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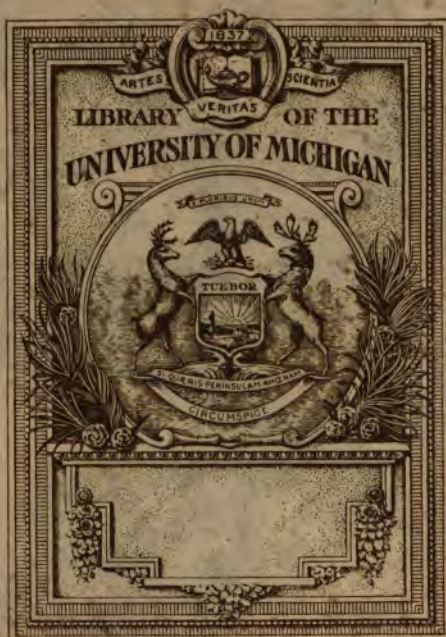
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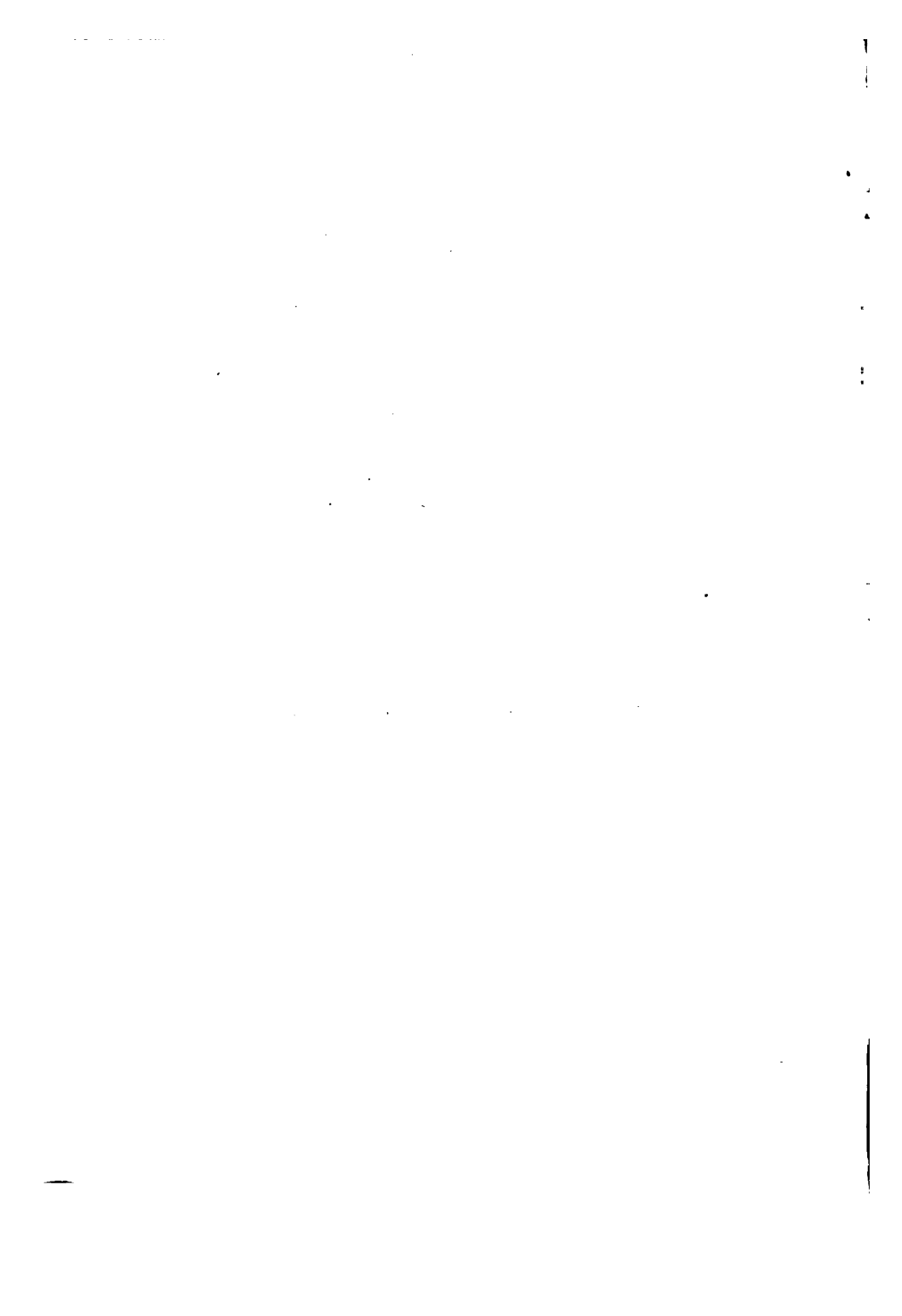
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## THE FACE OF DEATH



THE  
FACE OF DEATH

*A WESTMORELAND STORY*

BY  
E. VINCENT BRITON  
AUTHOR OF "AMYOT BROUGH," "SUE," ETC.

"The face of Death is towards the Sun of Life."  
TENNYSON.

NEW YORK  
MACMILLAN & CO.  
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1894



RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,  
LONDON & BUNGAY.

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We, the poor earth's dying race, and yet  
No phantoms, watching from a phantom shore  
Await the last and largest sense to make  
The phantom walls of this illusion fade,  
And show us that the world is wholly fair.

TENNYSON.

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# THE FACE OF DEATH

## CHAPTER I.

### THE LOWES.

He answered, "'Tis a haunted place,  
And spell beset."—J. INGELOW.

THERE was a vast amount of animated talk in the kitchen of the Lowes. Breakfast was over, the household business had begun, when it was suddenly interrupted by a startling communication from the old housekeeper, who, to use the cook's expression, had come on them "like a thunder-clap, and vanished like a flash of lightning." But cook had a strong way of putting things; the good old housekeeper of seventy years, with her gentle ways and feeble movements, was much misrepresented by such a comparison, and would have been greatly surprised had she overheard it. But she was far too intent on escaping from possible comments and embarrassing questions to linger near the kitchen, and she sped away faster than her rheumatic limbs could well carry her when she saw the butler's look of horror, the cook's uplifted hands, and the younger servants' scarcely suppressed amusement.

"Please go and tell them, Nan," her young mistress

B

had said—the housekeeper had been her nurse in days gone by, ay, and her father's nurse too—"do tell them for me, I can't, I really can't; they will laugh and whisper, I know they will, and then who knows what I might do?—laugh or cry, I don't know which. No, you must do it for me:" and so the old woman had departed on her errand; and though she had no intention of laughing or crying, she had her own reasons for telling her tidings as briefly as possible, and for returning with all speed to her young lady, lingering in the housekeeper's room over the porch to hear how she had sped on her errand.

There was a strange smile playing round the young girl's lips as she stood by the window waiting for her nurse's return; her eyes were fixed on the scene without—the valley beneath, and the hills beyond, where the clouds were casting stray shadows, and hiding now one, and now another of the distant peaks. She drew a long breath, it was scarcely a sigh, yet there was something as like sadness as her bright face could ever wear, as she said to herself, "The winter will soon be here, those long, long evenings, those endless talks about nothing, and I shall not be able to keep out of her way, as Alan said I must; no, I must see it and hear it and bear it as best I may.—Well, Nan, how did you get through the telling of it?"

"Just said as few words as I could and come away, and left them to talk themselves hoarse, as no doubt they will."

"And what did they say, nurse?"

"Nothing that matters much, my dear."

"Nan, tell me, help me to laugh, it's the cure for all my woes."

"*Your* woes, Miss Patty!"

"Yes, my woes, nurse ; why, even *you* don't pity me, though Alan did, brute that he is ; he is going away to-morrow."

"Going !—well, well, Miss Patty, let him, maybe it's better so."

"But tell me, Nan, what did Grimes say, and the maids ? did they know, think you ?"

"Know what ? Oh, that I've said the same thing, told the same news three times before, aye, just the very same words, ' Sir Andrew is coming home to-day, bringing a new lady with him.' Oh yes, they know, my dear, if that's your meaning !"

The girl assented by a motion of her head. Her eyes were still fixed on the distant hills and on the ever-changing streaks of light and shade that fell athwart them ; and the old woman, leaning back in her high-backed rocking-chair, watched her wistfully as one who would say, "Get it off your mind, my dear ; you'll feel a deal better afterwards."

"Well, Miss Patty," she said at length, "I can't say for certain how many of them has heard me say those words. George Crummock for one ; he looked just scared, and let a whole tray of spoons fall on the kitchen-floor when I said the words. Why, George will be seventy come Martinmas, nigh as old as I ; but the maids, they're for the most part young things from the country round ; what tales they may have heard I cannot say ; but George and I went to school together, and only came to these cold, outlandish parts when the old lady, your grandmother, would have us come, and why we've stayed is more than I can tell you."

"Nan, Nan, don't say that." The girl had left the window, and her arms were round the old woman's neck. "You stayed to serve my grandmother, and

when she died, to take care of my mother, and then to see to me—me and Alan.”

“Yes, yes ; that’s it,” said the old woman ; “and we’ve left off counting how many times the master has told me to go, and I’ve said I wouldn’t : how many is it, Miss Patty ?”

“Oh, hundreds, thousands,” laughed the girl ; “but tell me, Nan, what did cook say just now ?”

“Fie, for shame, Miss Patty, why do you care to hear their talk ? Old George, he just says, ‘And how many more, I wonder ?’ and he gathers up his spoons, and tramps off to his pantry ; and cook, she gives the cat a kick, and says, ‘’Tis a regular blue-bottle, he is.’ Blue-beard she means, my dear. And the girls and the lads, they were giggling fit to kill themselves, and that new man, he says, ‘Well, ’tis wonderful how fond the ladies be of marrying ;’ and that’s enough, my dear. Is it laughing or crying you are after all ?”

“Both, I think, Nan. Oh, if Sir Andrew could only have heard ; and she too. Does she know, I wonder ?”

“She, the new lady ; never a bit, my child, and won’t neither till she takes a walk round the churchyard.”

The young girl’s face, which had been like an April morn, the sunny smile breaking through tears, grew sad at these words.

“Ah, Nan,” she said, clasping her hands, “what things you have seen in this house ! Is not Alan right when he says there is a ghost in every room ?”

“Not for you, child, sure not for you ; and Sir Andrew,—well, as it seems, they don’t trouble him neither.”

“Nurse,” said Patty, “is it not hard on me ? Alan says he will wait till to-morrow, and then he will take

himself off, and it will be long ere he comes back to the Lowes again."

"And where is he going, and why?"

"Where, ah, that he has not settled; why he goes you and I can guess, Nan."

"It was a foolish thought of yours, Miss Patty; he is too young to wed,—but three-and-twenty come Christmas. That Christmas, shall I ever forget it? *Your* mother, Miss Patty, had a hard flitting, but ne'er a one so sad as Lady Alice, Master Alan's mother."

"Don't, Nan; sometimes I look at her picture in the dining-room, and my heart aches for her. I'm glad my mother isn't there. Ah me! and when Miss Hester Caudale comes to-night—I beg her pardon, Lady Wyke, my honoured step-mother, I mean—she'll look at Lady Alice's picture and think to herself, 'My husband's first wife'; but of my mother, and of 'Martha, my love, and Lucy, my dear,' she'll not think, will she, Nan? and none will dare to tell her."

"Where would be the good, Miss Patty? Ah, child, your tears are gone, and for all the sad memories you stir up, there's laughter in your eyes. Well, 'tis good to be young,—laugh while you may."

"That I will, Nan, and what's more, I am going to make the most of our one day's freedom. Alan and I are going up the hill beyond the tarn to take our lunch among the gorse and heather, right away from all the valley mists and ugly shapes and thoughts, and we'll not come back till near dinner-time, when the happy pair will be expecting a welcome;" and the sunny-hearted girl tripped away, calling to her brother as she ran down the wide stairs, and the old woman heard her merry laugh in the garden below a few minutes later.

"The happy pair!" repeated Nan Pudsey; "well, who knows? folks aren't all made alike. Well, now I'll have to think what I'll be doing. Didn't I say to myself two years ago that next time, if ever there was a next time, I'd see things sorted different like? I'd thought to be beforehand with him and spoil the wooing, but he's been over-quick this time, and now maybe it will not be so easy righted; but for all I'm seventy, and Sir Andrew is as masterful as ever, I'm not so certain sure how it will go between us. Miss Hester Caudale—yes, I can see her, it was she who came along with her cousin to beg me to find her a pair of dry shoes that drenching day last summer when the children, Master Alan and Miss Patty, had their hay-making picnic. I see her now; but it was of Master Alan then I thought, though maybe she was older than he, smaller than Miss Patty, and not so bonny by far; but there was a something in her big grey eyes, and a deal of something about her mouth that it does me good to remember. I wonder, did Sir Andrew never see that look? There's a woman in the Bible that came into my head when I saw that gleam in her eyes, a woman as drove a nail into a man's head as he lay asleep in her tent; I've no head for names, and it doesn't matter. But I shouldn't wonder if I see that look come into this new lady's eyes a many times yet, if so be I take to telling her what Master Alan calls the ghost stories of this house. If I do, if . . . but that depends on Sir Andrew. . . . Oh, here comes cook!"

"Oh, if you please, Mrs. Pudsey, you was that sudden just now, that you quite took my breath away, and I'd no time to ask about the dinner; and as for the young mistress, she's gone scratching up the hill 'long with her brother, and who can say when they'll be back; and

there's not a mortal thing settled, and the maids and me we're terrible put out. But, says I to myself, seeing as in this house it's the servants as keep their places and the missuses as don't, we're likely to know what's the right thing to have for dinner without asking anybody's opinion or liking."

"Perhaps you're meaning to say as much to the new lady, Mrs. Grimes? But as for the dinner, you know what Sir Andrew likes, and as there can't be a doubt Lady Wyke will prefer a peaceable meal this first night at least, he'd best have his favourite victuals. To-morrow she can please herself."

"I've been trying to remember what the other ladies used to like," cook remarked, "but, poor dears, they mostly had no appetite at all, and were always taking messes for their health; and Miss Caudale, as I hear, has a fine constitootion, and will maybe eat like other folks; at any rate at first, that is till she comes to know what she has undertaken. Married life is an awsome thing, Mrs. Pudsey."

"That's as you may take it, Mrs. Grimes. I've buried a husband, and so have you. Lady Wyke that is may do the same, who knows?"

"Mercy on us, Mrs. Pudsey, do you really think it possible? but as they say she has a fine constitootion, who knows? But well, that never so much as entered my head, yet, as you say, she may. But here comes Ellen, she'll be wanting some orders, for, as I said, you went off so sharp, we'd no time to think of anything."

"I've been turning out the bedroom, Mrs. Pudsey, for, thinks I, though there's no time for much washing of curtains and furniture, it shall be as nice as may be for the new lady as is coming, and there are a sight of things as want seeing to. I wonder, could you just

come and give a look round, and tell me what I'd best do with them? It's terrible upsetting, this sort of thing, and I make no doubt it's troubling you, thinking of all that's come and gone; but Miss Patty's out, and indeed it's as well. Thank you kindly, I knew you would. See here, under the bed there's a boxful of things which belonged to the last lady, they'll be best put away in the attic, I think; and all these bits of books and old photographs, I'll put them along with them; but the furniture, hadn't we best shove it about a bit, and make things look different, and bring some of the new fangled-chairs from the spare bedrooms, and a few new vases and gimcracks? It's so awfully gloomy, this room, I'm most afraid to come into it after dark; and as for that long looking-glass, I couldn't venture to look into it by candlelight if you'd pay me; I should go into screeching 'stericks right off, thinking I saw ghosts and ghostesses looking over my shoulder. It's a fact, Mrs. Pudsey, and I'm not an extraordinary nervous person either."

Mrs. Pudsey was silent, apparently examining the chintz curtains which the last summer's sun had left much faded and the worse for wear, and the dark Brussels carpet which no sweeping or shaking would render fresh-looking and cheerful; but though her eyes seemed to be taking stock of these things, her mind was perhaps more occupied with the pictures which the housemaid's words had recalled to her memory from the dead and sorrowful past. She roused herself with an effort.

"Maybe it will be best," she said. "There's the new curtains in the east bedroom, they're better than these, and there's a many easy-chairs about the house—one or two will look comfortable here; and take that old rug away and find another, and change the washhand china,



and get it all done as quick as you can ; there's other things to do, Ellen."

"To be sure ; I'm only waiting to hear what's to be done, Mrs. Pudsey. I'm sure we'll all do our best to make the new lady comfortable, for we can't but be sorry for her. Sir Andrew's that unlucky with his ladies—ay, but he's a persevering gentleman."

This was, as the housekeeper well knew, an attempt to draw her out, but such attempts were never known to come to good. Ellen was not an old servant, and had no right to make comments on Sir Andrew, or to pity his bride.

Mrs. Grimes might speak her thoughts ; she had known Patty's mother, and the two pale, trembling ladies who had succeeded to her honours ; she had been a wife herself, and had known a wife's trials, and what is to be expected of husbands, and what is right and fitting, and what's not ; but Ellen Fry was an old maid, and had never known the satisfaction of seeing a husband decently buried out of harm's way. What right had she to make remarks about the fearful mysteries of married life ? Brooms and brushes, pails and dusters were her province, and the housekeeper knew well how to keep her in her place.

And while the one talked and the other meditated, the brother and sister were already far up the mountain-side, bent on forgetting as long as they could the news which had so stirred the household at the Lowes. Ever light of heart, obstinately and determinately a butterfly, as her brother was wont to say, Patty Wyke could not and would not, under any circumstances, be serious long. "If we stay indoors all day," she had said, "with that silly letter in front of us, you will soon begin to croak, and who knows but I shall catch the complaint ?

Come out, Alan ; let's go up to the tarn, and lie among the bracken and the heather, and forget that there's any one else in the world but our two selves"—and her brother, whose way it was to follow her lead in trifles, agreed, and forth they started. They crossed the little foot-bridge, and sauntered along beside the stream, which at the bottom of the valley slides noiselessly along over mossy rocks and shingle ; then passed through a little plantation of young firs, and began to climb the hill. Alan strode silently along with the little basket containing their lunch, some newspapers and books, slung on a stick over his shoulders, while Patty tripped beside him, and lighter than a mountain goat darted hither and thither, now climbing a steep rock after a bit of stag's-head moss to wreath around her hat, now standing on a slippery point to watch the foaming milky torrent which rushed from the heights ; now singing snatches of simple songs ; now imitating the cry of the plovers as they skimmed away at her approach. "Sing too, Alan," she cried ; "'tis our last holiday, make the most of it." And together they sang, it had been their wont all through their young lives—"our one accomplishment," Patty used to say ; but the hill-sides were wont to have the best of their music, the lonely heights and the silent paths along the valley were their concert-room, and the song-birds were for the most part their only hearers.

They rested by the tarn, away from the restless tumult of the frothy rush and splash of Sour Milk Ghyll, seated on a great rock, under the shelter of those grim mountains, looking down on the motionless dark waters of the little mountain lake. Patty's fingers were busy with some knitting, her brother made an attempt to read, but failed signally, for Patty had so much to say. She always had, if the truth must be told ; but on this occasion, as

by common consent, the subject most present to the minds of both was carefully ignored, and the talk between brother and sister ran on the veriest trifles.

"You're such a butterfly, Patty," the brother said, as he stretched himself and yawned; "you have not said a single sensible thing to-day." And she replied, "Did I ever pretend to be anything else? Do you think I want to get that melancholy droop to the corners of my mouth which spoils yours? No, indeed; I always stand up for butterflies; and as to that odious insect, the busy bee, Sir Andrew has taught me to hate the very sound of her name."

It was not till the afternoon was beginning to wear away, and afternoon tea, as Patty said, "was becoming an absolute necessity," that they picked up their books and basket, and set off to run down the hill. At the first level part of the road Patty stopped, and said, "Heigho! now we must be serious; how hateful it is!—of all things in the world I detest being sensible—don't you, Alan?"

"Let it alone then," said her brother.

"Ah, but that won't do; we must look that hateful thing, the future, in the face, and make up our minds what we are going to do."

"As far as I'm concerned that's easily settled. I'm going away," replied Alan; "and what's more, I'm not coming back till the end of the century."

"You'll be back in three months' time; as soon as you're weary of your friends the Lowes will see you again," asserted Patty, laughing. "If I wasn't certain of that I should be downright dismal; as it is, I think it is perfectly brutal and heartless of you to take flight just now, and leave me all alone."

"You'll do better without me. I tell you plainly,

Patty, I'm not a boy any longer, and when the old game begins again—and begin it will—I shouldn't be able to stand by and keep the peace."

"Shouldn't you? Then go. I'm for a quiet life; but there's no escape for me, and what am I to do?"

"Patty, I've been thinking all the morning——"

"Do you think I don't know that? but thinking won't mend matters."

"Wait a minute, Patty, you must help her; you've heaps of sense, and you might."

"Thank you, sir; I thought I was nought but a butterfly. I'm humbly grateful; what's your pleasure?"

"Stand by her, Patty; such a splendid creature as she is must not be—what shall I say?—like the others."

"I'm nineteen, and she's at least five-and-twenty; if she can't manage for herself, she's not likely to come to me for help. It's that stupid vow they take which sticks in their throats and spoils their lives. Only think, Alan, if you and I had ever thought we ought to obey Sir Andrew, where should we be now?"

"Where indeed?" They both laughed merrily. "I do believe if we had learnt to call him father we should have grown up with the same notions. I wonder why we didn't."

"I haven't the least idea."

"Nor I. But, Alan, what possesses you to imagine that I could help this new Lady Wyke? Heigho, she'll be here in less than no time now."

"Oh, really, if you ask me how, I can't tell you; but when I look at you, so jolly and up to fun, I can't help wishing you'd show her the way to set about making the best of the horrid scrape she has got into."

"I'm not Sir Andrew's wife; should I be jolly if I were?"

"Oh, don't ask me. But, Patty, have a try. If she begins wrong it's all up with her. Don't shake your pretty little head. She's a brave girl, I know, and will die hard."

"She needn't die; but if you feel like that, Alan, stay and help."

"Not I, indeed; I shall be best away. I've no talent for peace-making. I should be more likely to lay violent hands on the old man."

"Old, Alan! you're desperately jealous. Barely fifty, just a nice age for a man, and so handsome too. Oh, how lucky she thinks herself—Lady Wyke,—and with money and carriages and all that heart can wish, except of course those tiresome step-children. There's the carriage coming over the bridge; stay and meet them by the gate, Alan, and I'll run in and see if tea is ready in the drawing-room."

She flew across the lawn, and Alan watched her light figure skim along until she disappeared among the evergreens, then leaning his arms upon the gate, he waited in gloomy thought the arrival of the carriage.

They were like and yet unlike, this brother and sister. Like in their ways, form, and bearing; but while the expression of Alan's face was at times gloomy almost to sullenness, his sister's could scarcely ever be said to bear even a trace of anxiety. Care and Patty were sworn foes. Her brow was rarely clouded for a minute, her blue eyes were for ever laughing, and the tones of her voice were like the echoes of low, sweet music. But Alan's mood was for ever varying; the morning would oftentimes find him even more joyous and light of heart than his sunny-tempered sister, but there were times when the evening shades would gather round him, and leave him a prey to such gloom as fairly terrified her.

"The air of the valley brought fogs and blue devils," he would say, but Patty knew well that the mountain heights had often been the scene of some of her brother's worst fits of despair. She wondered and could not understand. Old Nan had her own explanation of these gloomy hours, and perhaps she had reason on her side, but of that more anon.

The tea was ready for the travellers, and Patty, breathless and blushing, but very fair and lovely, was standing by Alan's side again, before the carriage stopped before the door. If he was grave and almost sullen, she had smiles in plenty to welcome the bride home. Sir Andrew played his part with solemn dignity. Patty admired, and whispered to Alan—

"Practice makes perfect. Each time he does it better."

It was a bright home-coming, and as they gathered round the cheerful little wood fire, ever welcome in the early autumn evenings, and sipped their tea, and talked pleasant little nothings about weather and travelling, Lady Wyke looked, and doubtless was, well content.

She had come as they all knew from a rather poverty-stricken home in Ireland, and the large mansion, with its luxurious furniture and surroundings, in all probability represented to her mind's eye freedom from some of the most perplexing trials of everyday life. The delicate china, the hot-house flowers about the rooms, Patty's dainty dress, all spoke to her of a refinement and comfort which had been well-nigh impossible in a home where the one servant had been a clumsy, untaught drudge, and where most of the housework fell to the share of the ladies of the family. Yet let it not be imagined that the prospect of worldly goods and position had been Hester Caudale's sole or even chief

inducement to change her maiden state. The brief period of her courtship had been quite long enough to place her middle-aged but well-favoured lover very high in her regard; and like many a woman before and since, she had not paused to ask herself how many of the lofty qualities with which she credited him were really his, and how many the creation of her own imagination. The dream was sweet; to be his first and only love would doubtless have been sweeter, but these children were grown up, the old love was of course quite forgotten. Perhaps it had been a marriage of convenience, some silly child-wife who could not appreciate the great soul of her husband. Death had brought a release, and now the true marriage was to begin.

## CHAPTER II.

### PATTY'S PHILOSOPHY.

"A merry heart goes all the day,  
Your sad tires in a mile-a."

SHAKESPEARE.

"THE air of the valley," which had to bear the blame of many of Alan Wyke's moody fits, must have penetrated with its depressing influence the bedroom of Hester Wyke on the first night of her sojourn in her new home ; for in spite of the fatigue of a long journey, in spite of the luxurious bed, in spite of the restful consciousness of having gained a position which would set her free from the teasing anxiety of money cares, it was long before she fell asleep, and when she made her appearance the next morning, though she made great exertions to conceal the fact, it was evident to all that she was languid and weary. Sir Andrew had said the night before, " I have an old-fashioned fancy for early rising, and like my breakfast at eight o'clock, my love ; " and she, with all the enthusiasm of early wifehood upon her, had resolved that she would be no hindrance to the gratification of this most respectable taste, though in her heart she detested early rising, and wondered why in this quiet country place it should be necessary or desirable to make such haste to begin the day. Patty evidently sympathized with her unexpressed opinion, for she had made the strange remark, " Alan and I breakfast



at nine, or half-past; and I advise you to do the same, Lady Wyke; the mornings are chilly, and we shan't mind waiting till ten if you prefer it." But, of course, her step-mother had warmly repudiated any such idea, declaring most hypocritically that eight was not at all too early for her, she should certainly not allow Sir Andrew to breakfast alone. How provoking it was that a bad night should have interfered with her resolution, and sent her down-stairs after Sir Andrew had left the table, and just as Patty and her brother were beginning their breakfast! Vexed with herself, she was not by any means well pleased to catch a glance interchanged between them, a glance of mischievous triumph, which recalled to her mind the many wonderings of that wakeful night, during which she had gone over some of the questions which are probably familiar enough to most step-mothers, but which she naturally enough imagined occurred with particular force to her.

It must be confessed there were some eccentric features in her position, such as suggested the inquiry oft repeated, "Why do these young people invariably call their father, Sir Andrew? Why does the son, so courteous to me and to his sister, doggedly persist in going away when his father so strongly objects? Why do the brother and sister exchange such meaning glances? Why do they cease their fun and lively talk the instant their father comes into the room? Was she the cause? Were they—people always say step-children are unreasonable—vexed with him for marrying again?" These and many similar questions had kept her wide-awake, and then had following corresponding good resolutions. "I will bring about a better state of things; they shall soon rejoice at the change in the house. I will win them to love their father; they shall rejoice

that ever I came to live at the Lowes. It has been a gloomy house, I see it well ; this room is gloomy, the air is heavy in it ; even Andrew is not so bright and full of talk as he was on our honeymoon ; and Alan, what ails him ? ” What a pity that the result of these midnight cogitations should have been a headache, a hasty toilet, and a late breakfast !

It was but small comfort when, in answer to her regrets, the two young people laughed gleefully.

“ Oh, Lady Wyke, I’ll love you with all my heart and soul,” cried Patty, “ if you’ll only come down late every morning. Think, Alan, how delicious it will be.”

“ It would be a great point gained, indeed,” said Alan gravely. “ Patty and I would feel a reverence for you beyond all words, Lady Wyke. It is of such vast importance to make a stand against prejudice, and assert one’s right of private judgment. It is only conceited people who get up early.”

“ Why, Alan, surely you forget how much trouble it must give the servants if we all breakfast at different hours, and your father’s wishes should be considered.”

“ Oh, the servants,” broke in Patty, “ they are quite indifferent.”

“ Well, then, your father’s wishes.”

Patty made a queer grimace, and Alan steadily considered the contents of his breakfast-cup. Poor lady, had she but known how often these two had heard that reflection before, and what memories the simple words called up, she would have contented herself with finding some other reason for her purpose of self-mortification.

She was startled by Patty suddenly throwing her arms around her and saying—

“ You poor dear, you hate getting up at unearthly hours ; I know you do, and you shan’t do it. I’ll tell Sir

Andrew so ; and you'll be good and sensible, and tell the servants that the breakfast-hour is nine,—that's early enough in all conscience."

"Oh, Patty, no ; don't let's make a fuss about a trifle. It must be as your father wishes."

"It's no trifle," Patty was saying, when Sir Andrew appeared, handsome and well-satisfied in the blissful consciousness of having performed a righteous act in eating his breakfast alone at eight o'clock, while the sinful world around abandoned itself to the lust of sleep. He was benign enough to accept his wife's faint apology with a forgiving smile.

"Ah, yes, the journey, a new room, bad night ; to-morrow will see us beginning afresh—you will be punctual," and then he proceeded to other matters.

"Patty will introduce you to the housekeeper, my dear, a faithful old soul, but peculiar. I have kept her for the children's sake. She was their nurse, but she is getting old, almost in her dotage, has strange fancies ; don't take everything for gospel that she may tell you."

"What is her name, Patty ?" said Lady Wyke, as they left the room together. "Shall I see her in the morning-room ?"

"Her name is Mrs. Pudsey ; we call her Nan. She is a dear old thing, she can tell you all about the servants, and, when you care to hear it, all the family history too, and all Sir Andrew's fads, and all my wicked ways ; she's the very best person in this wicked house. You may trust her, indeed you may, but nobody else, not even me."

It was a quaint but comely figure which stood awaiting the new lady in the morning-room. No modern housekeeper would have owned Mrs. Pudsey as a sister in the craft, yet Lady Wyke's heart, not quite so satisfied

as the day before, not quite at rest about the future, felt a sudden sense of trust and confidence, of revival and courage, as she met the honest kindly glance of those clear true eyes, and responded to her almost motherly greeting.

"You will tell me all I need to know," she said; "the northern ladies are first-rate housekeepers, so I have heard, but I never kept house before, and have much to learn; but with your experience I can't go far wrong, I'm sure. I want everything to go very smoothly and comfortably, you know."

"Then, my lady, you must take better care of yourself," old Nan replied. "You've rested ill, as is plain enough, and should have stayed in your bed this morning. I'm thinking you're one of those who doesn't know how to fend for yourself; we'll have to see to you, Miss Patty and I."

"That's a bargain, Nan," said Patty, who was flitting about the room, giving a touch to the flowers in the vases, and snipping dead leaves off the ferns, with ears intent to hear, and tongue ready to aid in the conversation. "Lady Wyke isn't used to early rising, and it doesn't suit her, so will you tell them not to get breakfast till nine, or, better still, half-past."

"No, no, Patty, your father said——"

"My lady," said the old woman, gently, "'tis as I said, you think too little of yourself. I will tell cook, and speak to Sir Andrew myself. It will be a kindness to Miss Patty too—she is not strong—the dear. But about the lunch and the dinner, will you tell me what's your pleasure?—or maybe I'd better call the cook."

Lady Wyke intimated that she would rather hear first the ways of the house, and what were Sir Andrew's favourite dishes, whereupon Patty and Mrs. Pudsey

exchanged glances, which revived the uncomfortable feelings which had troubled her at the breakfast-table, and made her again suspicious of some unpleasant mystery.

"Sir Andrew tells me that he has suffered from delicate health all his life, so we shall need to be careful about his meals," the new wife suggested with natural solicitude, but Patty's eyes laughed in a most unsympathetic way, and the old housekeeper said, "Sir Andrew *has enjoyed* ill health all his life, my lady; it's a pleasure many folks permit themselves—and why not, to be sure? But we won't be too anxious about him, though to be sure it's well he should have wholesome food," and for the second time that morning Lady Wyke felt silenced.

"Were they trying to manage her, to bring about dissension between herself and Sir Andrew?" The thought made her cheeks burn, and somewhat abruptly she gave her orders, and brought the interview to a close. "Lunch must be punctual," she concluded; "Mr. Alan leaves us this afternoon to join Captain Fanshaw's yacht at Southampton. I am sorry he goes so soon, I should like to have improved our acquaintance,—he was my first friend in this house, you know." Then the question of dinner was finally dispatched, and the housekeeper went away.

"What a sweet old face!" thought the young wife, "and how good she is to me,—none of those foolish notions about new mistresses and changes, which one reads about in books. She will make it easy for me. But what do they mean by those mysterious glances?—no harm to me, I'm sure; but yet I hate mysteries, and there seems to be something I don't understand. Can it be that Andrew is not so popular as I thought he

must be? something in their tone would seem to imply that he is fidgety and fussy, and must be managed. Well, whatever it may be, I will be loyal to him. Patty is strangely independent for her years. I too have been fond of having my own way, and somehow lately I have had a faint impression that I was not as free as in the old days; well, it must surely be easy to give way when one loves as I do;" and then she went in search of the object of her adoration, and found him engaged with some accounts which looked uncommonly like washing bills, but quite ready to accept, in his handsome, condescending way, the offering of her devotion at his shrine.

Alan departed immediately after luncheon, Patty accompanying him as far as the point where he expected to meet the afternoon coach. Sir Andrew had left the house a few minutes before, apparently quite forgetting that his son was going away, and saying nothing in the way of farewell; but this, neither the brother nor sister appeared to notice. Patty was as grave as it was possible for her to be, and as they left the house heaved something which was almost a sigh, as she said, "How I wish I was coming with you! Alan, what are you going to do?"

"To do!—go off with Fanshaw to the world's end, if he'll take me."

"And when you come back?"

"When I come back? Oh, settle down, I suppose; get work in one of the hospitals if I can, else why should I have gone in for medicine the last two years?"

"Why, indeed, you of all men to be a doctor! Do you know Sir Andrew says you'll go out of your mind if you persist in this idea?"

"Does he?" There was a weary indifference about her brother's manner, which the quick-eyed Patty saw. "Well," she said, "you'll wait a bit, at any rate."

"Yes, till I come back from this yachting business; I don't know how long it's to last."

"You don't care for it; I know you detest those men,—why do you go?"

"Must go somewhere, can't stay here. But I say, Patty, don't forget what we said yesterday."

"Is it likely? Alan, I like her; but oh, I wish, I wish—it had been some one else."

He made no reply, and she checked herself; she would never be serious long. "But that's neither here nor there; it isn't somebody else, it's just Sir Andrew, and I think, and Nan thinks, that we'll make his soup hot for him yet, as Mrs. Grimes says."

"Write and tell me, Patty."

"Never fear; you'll have letters enough if you ever think of sending me word where to address them."

He named one or two places, and then they caught the sound of the rumble of the approaching coach, and the walk became a run, and there was no more time for talk.

Slowly Patty wended her way back, much more soberly than was her wont. "It has all turned out so badly," she said to herself. "Why did Alan wait? I suppose he didn't really care for her; he might have known Sir Andrew would cut and carry her off before his eyes,—I am afraid my poor boy was born to be unlucky. Well, I must go back to my step-mother, and see how her education is getting on."

Alan's departure was but slightly alluded to by his father. "Gone, has he? A sadly erratic young fellow, my love,—no ballast, nothing to keep him steady;

sometimes I think there's a want," and he touched his forehead significantly.

Patty laughed, apparently she had no such apprehensions.

"We shall all miss him," said Lady Wyke kindly, but her husband replied—

"Not at all, my dear, except it may be as one misses a toothache when it has gone. I must confess I find the house, and every one in it, more tranquil and settled when he takes his restless person away."

"Oh, Andrew," Lady Wyke began, "how——," but he was gone. She glanced uneasily towards Patty; the girl had fixed an earnest, inquiring gaze on her, and Lady Wyke felt uneasy beneath that searching glance. It seemed to say, "Now, what do you think of him? Is your idol already beginning to totter to its fall?" The young wife shivered, and getting up, went to warm and rub her hands before the fire; but something told her that Patty understood it all, and was not deceived by the sudden movement. "She knows I do not want to look at her, she saw that I was vexed; but why is it she takes it all so quietly?"

"Patty," she said, settling herself in a low chair beside the fire, "we are going to be friends, are we not? Tell me all about yourself and Alan, your childhood, and how you have lived in this pretty home of yours; you were born here, were you not?"

"Yes; we were both born here. Alan is four years older than I. We have been great friends always; but really I do believe that no lives could have been more uninteresting than ours, so there's nothing at all to tell; at least I have no talent for story-telling. Now if you want to know all about us, you must ask old Nan; she can tell you everything that has happened here ever



since our grandmother came here fifty years ago, and she will tell it so prettily that it will sound quite worth hearing."

"Some day I will ask," Lady Wyke replied, "but not just yet, I think."

It seemed to be too early to admit a servant, even such a servant as Nan Pudsey, to such intimacy, and Hester Wyke resolved to restrain her curiosity and wait until chance brought an explanation of some of the strange circumstances in which she found herself. But there was something about old Nan which made every one forget she was a servant, and in a few days her new lady was as much at home in the housekeeper's little sitting-room as Patty herself was; and no wonder, it certainly was the cosiest place in the house.

Rain had set in, such rain as can only fall in mountain districts—steady, heavy, and constant. Patty was in bed with a bad cold, and Lady Wyke was dull and lonely. She took her knitting and went, as Patty often did, to sit with the old nurse. They talked of the rain, of Mrs. Pudsey's rheumatism, of Patty's cold, of rheumatism and colds in general and particular, and then Lady Wyke said—

"What pretty children they must have been, Mrs. Pudsey; you were proud of them, I'm sure," and that, as she had guessed would be the case, proved a fruitful theme to the old nurse. Miss Patty's pretty ways, and Master Alan's love for his sister, and what the folks up and down the dale said of them, and much more to the same effect; but something jarred on the listener, and she said—"and their father too, of course?"

"Oh, Sir Andrew—well, maybe, but he hasn't a gift for being much of a father, as no doubt you've observed, my lady. Gifts differ, and his don't lie in that line."

"They don't call him father ; it seems to me so strange. I wish they would. How did that come about, Mrs. Pudsey?"

"How did it come about that they say Sir Andrew, and never father? Well, I've been asked that so many times, and I can never say for certain. Master Alan being the elder began it, and Miss Patty, little dear, did as he did ; but why or wherefore, I couldn't say, my lady."

"Did their mother never teach them to call him father? How strange it seems!"

Mrs. Pudsey coughed, fidgeted a little, stirred the fire, and then said—

"My lady does not know then that Lady Alice, Master Alan's mother, died at his birth, and Miss Patty's mamma when she was a few months old? Poor wee things, their mothers are but names to them. Sure there's the likeness of Lady Alice in the dining-room ; but what's a picture after all. And the other ladies, well, they might have mothered the children a bit, but their health was so bad, you see. Sir Andrew's been so unlucky with his ladies, that for all the marrying and giving in marriage nothing much has come of it all, as one may say. I'm in hopes, my lady, as you are strong ; and we'll do our best to keep you so."

"Very strong as far as I know"—Lady Wyke felt bewildered. "Then Patty's mother was not the Lady Alice of whom Sir Andrew has told me, and whose portrait I have noticed? I misunderstood him, I suppose."

"Maybe, my lady. It has been a doleful time for the children. Master Alan, poor laddie, it has told on him, not being light-hearted like his sister. Ah, I remember when he was but two or three, how he fretted about an

ugly little dog that died ; and then when Miss Patty's mamma just faded away, and went out like the snuff of a candle, all along of being worried out of her senses, he took on terrible, did little Alan. 'Everything dies,' he used to say ; and if the least thing ailed Patty, it was all day his cry, 'Will she die too, Nan ?' And then when the other poor ladies one after the other went the same way, he'd come and sit here, and talk quite desperate like. We were glad to get him away to school and college, though Miss Patty does miss him terrible, as you may see. My lady, this room is close with so many flowers ; I'll open the window and let in some air ; or shall I make you some tea, hot and strong ?"

"No, no, I am not faint, only in want of exercise. See, it is scarcely raining now ; I shall wrap up and go round the garden"—and somewhat abruptly Hester Wyke broke away from these overwhelming confidences. Air she must have—air and movement ; the atmosphere of the house seemed to stifle her ; she must be alone to think over what she had heard. Yet as she passed along the garden-walks, between the high hedges of laurel and rhododendron, hurrying along in her agitation and excitement, the thought of those "other ladies" of whom Nan Pudsey spoke rose up before her ; they too had trod these walks ; they too had come there happy, expectant brides ; they too had loved, and doubtless thought themselves beloved ; they had hoped as she, and now . . . . Then she shook herself, and asked herself if she was going to be fanciful and nervous and superstitious.

"Because Andrew has lost some wives—positively I don't know how many—is that any reason why I should die of fright ? They were delicate or weak-minded ; I am neither ; he was unlucky, as the old woman said ; it was

not his fault they died. But why did he not tell me? Perhaps he thought I knew; having visited the neighbourhood I might, of course, have heard. Would it have made any difference if I had? I cannot tell. Worried, she said. Well, he will not worrit me. Some women take every trifle to heart, and fret themselves ill about every cross look; that has never been my way, and why should it be now? But it was a pity Patty made all that fuss about the breakfast-hour, as if it could signify. Of all things in the world, I hate a fuss about trifles."

Nevertheless I am inclined to think that before that day closed, Lady Wyke had begun to feel that old Nan's word "worried" had a depth of meaning in it, and that though she hated a fuss about trifles, an uncomfortable consciousness was springing up within her that life is made up of trifles, and that much of one's peace of mind, and a very great deal of our bodily comfort, not to say the comfort and peace of our households, depend on such mere nothings that we can hardly say what they are, though we know well enough how essential they are to us, even when we are ashamed to own it.

It was a trifle certainly, yet it did not altogether please her when requested in Sir Andrew's most courteous tones—"My love, may I ask you to oblige me by not sitting with your feet on the fender?" Or again, "Is it possible, my dear Hester, that you are a victim to the weak-minded habit of adding postscripts to your letters? If you have forgotten anything, I should really advise you to rewrite the letter entirely,—forgive me suggesting it." Or, later in the day, "Lady Wyke, I am painfully conscious that Patty has a clumsy trick of running up and down-stairs. I can barely excuse it in her; but my wife,

Lady Wyke, has a position of her own, and will, I am sure, bear herself with becoming dignity."

Yes, such hints were not altogether pleasant. Nothing seemed a trifle in Sir Andrew's eyes ; and a harassing fear was beginning to shape itself in his young wife's mind, that before long she too should cease to speak of trifles in this solemn and portentous world of her new life.

## CHAPTER III.

### AWAY AND FORGET.

"Yet wine and laughter, friends ! and set  
The lamps alight and call  
For golden music, and forget——"

TENNYSON.

IT was with no very real or settled purpose of any kind that Alan Wyke had left his home. He had gone because, under existing circumstances, it seemed to him quite impossible to stay there.

"I cannot, and will not, see the old game played over again," he had said, and he had thereupon told his sister that he should go off yachting with an old school-fellow, and not show himself again at the Lowes until things had grown better or worse. Yet, so little did the prospect of this cruise please him, that had any other idea suggested itself, he would have been well content to change his mind again, and so not have formed one of the little party that went on board the *Jackal* at Southampton the day after that on which he had left Easedale. More than once in the course of his journey south had he wished he had not sent word to Captain Fanshaw that he would come. More than once he had said to himself that he would have done with all his old friends, go off to the far East, or the far West, hide himself from the sight and knowledge of all his kith and kin, bury the past, and start afresh. But Alan Wyke had no

passion for travelling, no exploring tastes, no fervent desire to shoot tigers or hunt elephants, not even a moderate fancy to go in search of icebergs and polar bears, the idea of a horse-ranche had no attractions for him ; and as it so happened that he had no friend at that time bent on any such experiment, he gave up the thought of any lengthened exile, and told himself he must go with Fanshaw, since he could think of nothing else to be done.

Apparently the same helpless feeling had influenced another member of the little party ; in fact it might be said to be the chronic condition of the Hon. Charles Fitzacre, whose one motive of action, if the word action can be used to describe the drifting existence of such a person, whose one apology for being was, "there's nothing else to be done."

"You here, Fitz !" was Alan's greeting ; "didn't know you cared for the sea."

"Well, don't know that I do, but at the present minute there's nothing else to be done."

"Thought you were in Scotland. Heard you'd taken a shooting with a lot of other fellows."

"Not I indeed — tried that last year — detestable weather — no birds ; not going in for that again in a hurry. No ; Fanshaw asked me, and positively there was nothing else to be done."

Alan laughed dismally, but the Hon. Charles was no favourite of his, and he cared not to admit him to his confidence so far as to echo his words, and say that he too had come because he could think of no more interesting occupation, and therefore had accepted the Captain's invitation, although a week before he had refused it.

"Why do you go ?" Patty had asked. "Captain Fanshaw may be good-natured enough, but you know

you always say you detest his set ;” and he had replied, “ Detest them I do, but I *must* take myself off somewhere, and so I shall telegraph to ask if he’ll have me,” and thus he had gone.

“What’s the matter with you, Wyke ?” was Captain Fanshaw’s inquiry when they were running down Southampton Water, and the bustle of meeting friends and starting was over ; “you look so grim. What’s amiss ? Governor gone and got married again ? What !” —for Alan had nodded—“you don’t mean it ? What a blundering sort of fellow you must be ! Why don’t you cut in and spoil his games for him ? Suppose he has another family, where will you be ? Who’s the lady this time ? Fourth or fifth, which is it ?”

Alan briefly answered these questions, and then tried to change the subject, but the Captain was not so easily satisfied.

“Irish, is she ?—think I know the name,—poor, aren’t they ? Think’s she’s made a hit, I dare say. And you only heard it the day they came home, and that’s why you made up your mind to join us. Well then, fling care to the winds, forget the new mamma and all the babies in prospect, and come with us to Jericho.”

“Wherever you like,” said Alan, “the further the better. Can’t we go off to the North Pole and end our days among the icebergs ?”

“Haven’t decided about ending my days yet,” was his friend’s reply, and then they smoked a while in silence.

It was a gorgeous sunshiny day ; the scene was a bright and smiling one, the banks were green, the foliage of the trees was rich with glowing colour and many tints : it was by no means a day or a scene to disgust one of the world or of life, and Captain Fanshaw was in a good humour with himself and his surroundings.



"He'll brighten up presently," was his comment to Fitzacre when Alan had left the two alone together, and gone below. "Awfully cut-up about this last move of that old sinner; but we'll rouse him up, and put it out of his head."

"Know the old fellow?" inquired Fitzacre, without removing his cigar from his lips.

"Haven't that honour; seen him once,—handsome fellow,—all the women mad after him; knows it too, of course."

"How does he get rid of his wives?—what's the secret?"

"I asked Wyke once, and all he said was—'Worries them.'"

"Queer that, must be funny to hear; can't you draw Wyke out?"

"Well, no, better not. Let him forget it. Talk about it, and he'll be black as night for a week."

"Sulky sort of cub, eh?"

"Not a bit of it, I like the fellow. Have you heard him sing, Fitz? Why, his voice would make his fortune if he chose to use it. When he's all right and in good spirits, he's at it all day long, and his sister is just like him."

"Doesn't look like singing now."

"Perhaps not. But, to tell the truth, Wyke is two men; the one a very devil of gloom and moroseness, as you see him now, and the other the very jolliest of good fellows that ever you saw. I knew him at Eton, and even as a kid he was now one thing and now the other. The fellows used to say he saw ghosts."

"Ghosts of step-mothers! That would be hard lines; they should confine their attention to the old fellow rather than the son."

Here Alan joined them, and the talk turned on the yacht and the Captain's plans, and he heard to his surprise that they were going into Cowes to pick up another traveller, a lad whom Fanshaw had undertaken to convey to his relations in the south of France.

"He's been ill, and the doctors said this bit of a cruise would be just the thing for him, sea air was the very best medicine, and his people asked—no, they didn't ask me to bring him, but I knew they wished it, and we're neighbours in Derbyshire. I couldn't well get out of it. But they're a queer set, a fanatical brood, belong to some outlandish sect, I believe. We shan't suit him, nor he us, I fear."

"Come to the wrong shop," said Fitzacre; "what was his mamma about to trust you?"

"What was I about to ask him? I'm wondering. Temporary insanity, I believe. One has these fits of mental aberration occasionally. I believe I hoped she'd refuse. She didn't though, worse luck."

"Glad to save the boy's fare—hard up like me, perhaps?" suggested Fitzacre.

"Not at all—rich as Jews. Don't like the sea, mother and sisters, and this boy does; that's why they split company. Well, this is uncommonly jolly after London; no noise but the splash of the water, bright sunlight, and every now and then a dash of salt water on your face."

"The best part of the whole business is that it makes one feel so sleepy—haven't felt so drowsy for an age," was Fitzacre's reply, as he made himself comfortable with a pile of rugs under his head and settled himself for a snooze. "Wake me when you go into Cowes."

The shores and sea round Cowes presented a gay and brilliant scene. White-sailed yachts glided about, or

lay at anchor near the shore. The *Jackal* slipped in among them, and dropped her anchor for the night.

As Alan lay in his berth that night trying to struggle forth from the labyrinth of gloomy thoughts that oppressed him, it occurred to him to wonder what the fanatical brood could be like to which the young lad belonged who had come aboard that evening. And as he wondered, he mentally compared the countenances of the two elder men—their well-cut, high-born cast of features, but cold hard expression, with the animated, eager face of the young boy who had come aboard that evening so full of delight, so evidently bent on enjoying himself, and with such a power of carrying out that intention, that his high spirits were perfectly amazing to his fellow-travellers.

Fitzacre had looked cynical and bored when young Dighton, bubbling over with excitement, found causes of merriment and interest in everything about the yacht. Captain Fanshaw was pleased at the admiration his craft excited, and listened with some amusement to the lad's bursts of pleasure and eager questions.

Evidently it was long since he had been much in the society of boys, and the novelty of the experience was not without its charm for him. To Fitzacre's growl, "Cubs of that age should be shut up till they've got some sense. What a row that fellow makes!" he had replied good-humouredly, "'Tisn't a bad thing in its way, that power of making a row, it will give him a spurt, and carry him a good way on into life. I believe he's always so. I've seen him out with the hounds, going on just in the same way, in the maddest spirits, getting fun out of everything, riding any kind of horse, taking the most impracticable fences, tumbling off, and getting up again. Queer, considering the set he belongs

to. Sorry he bores you, Fitz. Alan must look after him."

And Alan was nothing loath; but the lad required no looking after, the company of the sailors provided all he needed in the way of amusement, and to help them was the rarest fun. "I'm a capital hand at cleaning brass, and at Rugby they said I was a first-rate cook, and as I'm certain not to be sea-sick, I'll be sick nurse, if required. You know, Captain Fanshaw, I've got to work out my passage."

Meanwhile to Alan the boy's laugh and the boy's fearless, straightforward glance and joyous manner had proved as refreshing as the breezes on mountain tops which disperse the mists of the valley. He was glad Rob Dighton had come on board, and secretly determined that he would chum with him, and leave the other two men to themselves.

And before long it became plain to him that the lad was well content to have it so. With Captain Fanshaw he would chat in his boyish fashion, but he was evidently not entirely at his ease with him, while from Fitzacre he shrank with manifest dislike, and something much akin to fear. With Alan he was entirely different, and as the two others appeared glad to have him taken out of their hands, it soon came to pass that Alan found himself in possession of most of the leading features of Rob's family history, and could almost have believed that the mother and sisters who formed the centre of the boy's small world were personally known to him. Something Rob would fain have known of his new friend's belongings; but about *his* home Alan was wont to be very silent. He couldn't remember his mother; he had one sister; they lived in Westmoreland, that was all the boy could elicit; and nothing that Alan said explained what

his boy-friend desired greatly to know, the secret of the cloud which seemed to hang over his spirits. And yet it was not long before Alan became aware that this boy of sixteen was creeping into his confidence in a way that no one, not even Patty, had ever yet done, and that in their talk they had more than once touched on topics which Alan had never in the whole course of his existence spoken of to any living being; he wondered at himself, and ever and anon as a word uttered by Rob in his cheerful ringing tones reached the ears of the two elder men, and he marked the look of surprised contempt with which Fanshaw regarded him, he asked himself, was he a fool or a hypocrite, in that he let the lad talk on, and neither by word nor sign objected?

"And yet why should I?" he asked himself wearily. "What care I what the lad thinks? His mother's creed seems to please him, why should I disturb him?—and as for what the others think"—he smiled bitterly—"did I ever care for their opinion, that I should let it influence me?"

From Cowes they crossed the Channel to Havre. Somebody had suggested that they might as well visit some of the places up the Seine.

"Don't suppose there's anything to see," observed the Hon. Charles; "but at any rate it will be smooth water, and to be able to eat your dinner without your plate walking away from you, is a luxury not to be despised. Let's go up the Seine by all means, Fanshaw."

It was Saturday evening; the boy had gone to bed, and the other three were smoking their last pipe before turning in. The *Jackal* was lying in calm water inside Havre harbour, and the talk had turned on the plans for the morrow.

"We want a few things," said Captain Fanshaw;

"what a blessing it is the French have no insane notions about shutting their shops on Sunday! Are you going ashore, Wyke?"

"Of course," said Fitzacre with a sneer, "the boy will take him to church."

"Or I may take him," Alan replied coolly.

"His mamma will be much obliged to you," said Fanshaw; "I did not undertake the care of his spiritual concerns, not feeling inclined to play the hypocrite for his sake."

Alan's lip twitched; he was annoyed at the insinuation, but he replied good-humouredly—

"I don't see why you two should disturb yourselves so much about my morals. I am sorry if the boy and I annoy you. I like him, I own; life seems such fun to him, while with me it's been rather flat and stale of late; but as for his ideas, why, I hold with them as little as you."

"He's a conceited young ape," said Fitzacre.

"I don't agree with you, he's only repeating his nursery tales; he'll leave off believing them quite soon enough."

Silence fell upon the party after this, till Alan, who had passed a pleasant day, and had no mind to quarrel, began to sing; and the others were well content to sit in the darkness, watching the lights in the harbour and town, and listening as song after song floated over the waters. Whenever he stopped, they said, "Go on;" and once or twice Fitzacre, who thought he was musical, joined in, and thus peace was restored.

They all went ashore the next morning, and spent the day strolling about the town. Alan, whose spirit had been roused to opposition by the remarks made the night before, accompanied Rob to church.

Then they roamed about the town, peeped into the church of Notre Dame, and looked at the historical coloured windows round the church, which Rob was eager to understand ; then along the boulevards, through the *marché aux fleurs* ; and, finally, wandered up to the little suburb of Ingouville to see the view from the top of the hill over St. Adresse and the mouth of the Seine.

"But I want a good long walk to stretch my legs," said Rob ; "can't we go and see that place you were talking about yesterday that our Henry V. took—Harfleur, isn't it ? I don't believe it is far from here. Shall I go into that shop and ask ?"

"Yes, do ; your French is better than mine."

"Is it ? I make six mistakes in every sentence ; but the people are so clever, they all understand ; I dare say they could talk English if they chose. I'll try English in this shop before I air my bad French."

He ran across the road, and Alan stood waiting for him, wondering, and he had been doing little else the last two days—wondering why this lad, not so very much younger than himself, not more lucky nor more healthy, should find so much more fun in life than he. "What is it takes the edge off all enjoyment, spoils all plans for me, if not for him ?" And as he stood meditating and waiting, his eye fell on a melancholy little procession slowly wending its way up the hill. Only a poor hearse preceded by a single priest, and two or three choir-boys, and followed by one solitary mourner. It was on its way to the cemetery. Alan's attention was riveted on the one old mourner, who with bent figure and clasped hands, the very picture of patient sorrow, followed the coffin of his wife or child to the grave. Alan gazed, and his face grew stern and pale.

"The answer to my question is there," he said. "What can life be worth while the Shadow of Death is for ever crossing it? Forget it for a day, on the next it is across your path, and the light is gone.—What did you say, Rob?—have you found out the way to Harfleur?—let's go then by all means."

Harfleur proved to be as Rob expressed it, a "jolly little place, but much in want of a few painters and glaziers." The splendid spire of the church could be seen from a distance, and lured them on; then they went across the little bridge over the river, and stood before the beautiful façade of the church. Rob was delighted to listen to some confused legends related by a group of children concerning the great English king who once held the place, charmed also to find the figure of St. Henry in the coloured window, wished he had lived in those times; but on second thoughts believed the nineteenth century was after all the jolliest time in the world's history, and England without doubt the jolliest country in the world.

The afternoon service was going on while they were there. Alan and his eager boy friend stood and listened at the end of the church among some school-children who were under the guardianship of some black-robed *sœurs*, and round-faced, cheerful-looking *frères*.

The church was full, and at the moment the two friends entered, a friar in the pulpit was delivering a vehement and apparently eloquent harangue which attracted their attention, though neither was sufficiently familiar with the language to follow his rapid and impassioned utterance, and Rob came out bitterly lamenting that he knew so little French.

"I wanted so awfully to know what he was talking about," he observed, when the party were once more



assembled on board the *Jackal*, and Captain Fanshaw, who was near and happened to hear the remark, smiled at his eagerness and inquired—

“What on earth did it matter what he was talking about?” a question which seemed greatly to astonish the boy.

“Why, you see, Captain Fanshaw,” he said, half-apologetically, “it seems such a pity not to hear and see all one can in a foreign country. Of course, it’s all new to me. I haven’t been about the world as you have.”

“Well, I can’t remember any period in my life when I had any curiosity to know what a Romish priest had to say, or any priest in the world for that matter. It’s their business to propagate superstition, and they do it—some better, some worse.”

“The man was so awfully in earnest,” said Rob, “he meant what he said.”

“A good actor, so much the better. The parsons in England don’t often put on that appearance.”

Rob was startled, and was about to speak when Alan interposed—

“I didn’t know you went to church, Fred.”

“Not often; but I did when at Eton, and a few times since. When one visits at some houses, it’s impossible to avoid going through the ceremony. A horrid bore, but a harmless absurdity.”

“I should have said,” Alan remarked, “that it can hardly be a harmless absurdity, but must be right or wrong, and the priest must be honest or dishonest.”

“Oh, those words right and wrong are hardly applicable to such an unimportant matter as church-going; a pure question of taste, my dear fellow, about as important as the way you brush your hair. Those who find any pleasure in the practice are quite welcome to

indulge themselves provided they let me alone. And as for the parsons, why, they're not the only humbugs in the world,—are they, Rob?"

Alan had noticed a very bright colour in the boy's cheek, and a flash in his eye which seemed to him ominous of a falling out between him and his host, and he lost no time in changing the subject of discussion, and resolutely prevented any return to it.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A MOONLESS SEA.

"My life, my being, all that meaneth me,  
Goes darkly forward into something. What?"  
G. MACDONALD.

TWO or three days were to be spent visiting the little towns on the banks of the Seine before they betook themselves again to the open sea.

"All the places seem much alike," Fitzacre observed, "odious smells and villainous bad cooking; but one must go somewhere, and if only those two wouldn't persist in finding it jolly, the whole business would be endurable, but this parade of cheerfulness is detestable, all humbug, and by way of appearing more amiable than the rest of the world. The French have the same way of going on, all chatter and grins."

Captain Fanshaw had just lighted a fresh cigar, and was more intent on enjoying it, and more interested in watching the preparations for starting, than on replying to this cheerful speech. He had, it is to be presumed, reasons of his own for putting up with the society of the Hon. Charles, or he might have given him the slip and left him behind at Havre, as his friends were rather fond of doing when they had been so unlucky as to find themselves drawn into including him in an expedition of any kind: that he did not even meditate doing such a thing, would argue much good-nature and forbearance

on the part of the Captain, or that he was too indolent to take such a step.

They crossed to Honfleur. "Just to say we have seen it,—beastly place," growled Fitzacre.

"Oh, Wyke, what fun it would be to land here and stay a day or two!" cried Rob.

"But as it's impossible to please both of you," said the Captain, "we'll go on, and perhaps land here on our way back," and Rob declared himself quite sure that that would be ever so much better.

"Don't you think he's sea-sick?" whispered Rob, as the yacht proceeded on its way, passing green banks and quaint little villages, where life seemed a quiet and leisurely sort of affair, and the people had much time to consider their neighbours. The same monotonous growl of discontent and constant depreciation of all surrounding objects had gone on all the morning, and the idea of sea-sickness as an explanation had suddenly occurred to Rob's mind. But Alan shook his head.

"Not *sea-sickness*," he said; "at least, there's no reason to suppose he's specially sick of the sea, but sick of everything, and the sea among other things, no doubt."

"But why, Alan?"

"Oh, don't take to asking why; you'll know soon enough."

The boy stared. Then remembering the strange changes of mood he had observed, even in his admired Alan, he refrained from further questions, and merely replied—

"I hope not."

They landed at Caudebec.

"There's a fine church here, I believe," said Captain Fanshaw, "and it makes a change to take a meal on shore," to which his dejected friend assented.

"Anything to break this detestable monotony;" but the luncheon was not to his mind. "French cookery, indeed!" and he seemed on the very verge of despair.

Rob in his innocence of such sensations was much concerned, and almost frightened.

"Nothing seems to amuse him," he said; "isn't he going mad, or something of the kind? Do you think he'll commit suicide, Wyke?"

"Suicide? Oh dear, no! Why should he?"

"To put an end to his misery; he seems so awfully bad."

"Not a bit of it, my boy; he'll never die of his sufferings, though other people may."

"You don't seem a bit sorry for him, nor Captain Fanshaw either. It does seem so odd not to enjoy going about like this, seeing all these jolly places, and having such an easy time of it. I can't believe he's tired of his life; he's quite young, isn't he?"

"You're most uncommonly young, Rob, even for your years; have you never come across any of this species of animal before?—it's common enough."

"No, never," Rob said, adding in an undertone, "he was sure no one need wish to know them." Then, seeing the Captain near, he checked himself, and obeying Alan's call to come and have a look at the church, he soon forgot Fitzacre and his grievances.

Returning to the *Jackal* about sunset, they found the yacht had got into some trouble among some heavy barges which were floating down with the tide, and it was some little time before she could get clear. Then there arose much discussion as to the course to be pursued,—should they go on as far as Rouen, or return on their track, and betake themselves to the open sea?

At length the latter course was decided on, the Captain voting that a good sea-breeze was much to be preferred to the stuffy atmosphere of these little towns, and Fitzacre, with much swearing at things in general, and the French in particular, protested that dawdling about in the way they had been doing lately was simply detestable, and the other two expressing no desires either way.

Alan Wyke had started on this expedition with no anticipations of much enjoyment, bent only on one thing, to tear himself from the vexations and worries which seemed inevitable at home. More than once, during the past few days, he had told himself that things were turning out better than he had expected. Fanshaw was good-natured—they had old remembrances in common—and he made a fairly good host, and Rob was a decided addition to their party. At any rate, he told himself he had escaped for a while from the gloom and presentiments, from the awful shadow which all his life long had seemed to meet him at every turn, to lie in wait for him at every corner of the road, starting up and presenting its dreadful form even when he least expected it. Had he left it behind among the deep glooms of his native vales, sitting still and shrouded as he had often pictured it beside the desolate tarn, or on the lonely woodland path? Yes, he had succeeded in escaping from it, in the society of men, in the bustle of towns, among the cheerful stir of life; or, as now, upon the restless ocean wave, he could forget it, could bury the past, and live in the present. Other men did, then why not he?

“What is it, Rob?”

Alan had been lying in the bows of the yacht, with a book before him, but lost in thought, when the lad came

up to him, not in his usual wild spirits, but quiet and suppressed, so unlike himself that his friend looked up surprised, and repeated—

“What’s up, Rob?”

“Oh, you’re reading,—then I won’t plague you. I’ve a book in my pocket, I believe.”

“What’s the matter? Have you been with those fellows?” glancing towards the other end of the boat. “You haven’t been cheeking Fanshaw, have you?—better not try that on, Rob.”

“No, I said nothing—they weren’t talking to me; but I was helping Ned to mend that sail, and they were talking.”

“Well!”

“It’s horrid.”

“What’s horrid? Fitz’s discourse? Well, it *is* sometimes. Most likely he’s drunk.”

“Hasn’t he ever known any decent men and women? are all his friends like those he talks about?”

“You and I are among his friends, Rob.”

“Thank you, no. I shan’t know him if I meet him in the street.”

Alan laughed, but Rob was too angry even to smile.

“Captain Fanshaw is awfully good-natured; but I wonder he doesn’t pitch him overboard.”

“Too much trouble,” was Alan’s reply. “Are you afraid his sins will sink the yacht?”

“No, I’m not afraid of that,” said Rob, after a moment’s reflection; “but he spoils all the fun.”

“Nonsense; keep out of his way.”

To this injunction the lad made no reply, and Alan returned to his book. Rob pulled out his, and tried to read; but before long he sauntered off again, and Alan soon after heard his voice in merry talk with two of the

sailors. Then Fanshaw came up to him, and began discussing the weather, about which he and the men were not agreed.

"Old Tom declares we're in for a gale, and wants me to put in somewhere—can't see the least sign of it myself; but he's an obstinate old fool, and what he says he'll stick to. I shall hear of nothing else all day."

"Calm enough at present," Alan replied. "I was just wishing for a breeze."

The Captain agreed.

"Thunder about," he said; "the wind may get up suddenly. I say, Wyke, that boy is a plague. I was a fool to bring him, always hanging about where he isn't wanted; and if a storm gets up, what a funk he'll be in."

"Think so?" said Alan. "Now, for my part, if we're in for a gale, I advise you to put Fitz to bed."

The Captain whistled.

"Oh, he'll be all right in an hour or two,—a little muddled just now,—steady enough on his legs, though. I'll go and look at the glass. Old Tom's a fool."

Fool or no fool, old Tom's prophecy seemed fated to come true, when about sunset the heavy stillness of the air was suddenly broken by violent gusts of wind, while a long rumbling peal of thunder rolled and echoed from one side of the heavens to the other. The yacht began to roll and pitch, and a good deal of water came on board.

"Told ye so," said old Tom, with grim glee; "it'll be a black night, Captain. Better ha' put into that place—what do ye call it—Faycong?"

"Stiffish wind, certainly," admitted Fanshaw, gravely; "but the yacht is good for a worse gale than this is like to be."



"A real gale," cried Rob, rubbing his hands; "what fun! I never expected such luck. Has the *Jackal* been often caught in a gale before, Tom?"

"Of course," broke in Fanshaw; "but we don't call this a gale, Rob."

"Don't ye? Well, ye will soon," muttered old Tom, as a heavy rolling sea broke over the bows, and the yacht shivered and creaked; then, rising on the top of a huge rolling billow, plunged headlong into the foam beyond.

"This is splendid, glorious!" cried Rob, spluttering forth the spray, which had half choked him; "I never saw such a sea. Oh, what a flash!"

"Yes, we're in for it," said Captain Fanshaw, gloomily.

The next hour but few words were exchanged. The wind shrieked and howled, and the sea broke with violence over the deck, keeping all hands busy; the thunder rumbled on in the distance, and bright flashes lit up the black sky.

In a lull of winds and waves some loud altercation went on between Fitzacre and his host. The former was demanding angrily why Fanshaw had not foreseen the danger; "You're fond enough of hanging about shore in fine weather, why on earth do you go to sea in a storm?"

The answer was brief.

"Take yourself down below, Fitz, you're no use here. Turn in; the yacht will weather this storm, you'll see."

Rob was standing near Alan; his bright face, all wet and glowing, grew suddenly grave as he turned to his friend—

"I say, Alan," he asked, "is there any danger? He seems frightened, doesn't he?"

"I know nothing about it," Alan replied, "but the

men don't look altogether happy, nor Fanshaw either. Are you frightened, my boy?"

"Frightened?—no, I don't think so. I'd rather not be drowned. Life's so jolly, you know; but I'm not frightened,—oh no."

"That's all right. Take care, Rob"—a sudden lurch of the yacht had sent the lad staggering across the deck—"hold fast to something or you'll roll overboard."

"Yes, I think you're right, there *is* some danger," said the boy, panting and choking after a sudden encounter with a wave. "Thanks; oh, don't bother about me"—to Captain Fanshaw, who had helped him to his feet—"I'm all right."

"An ugly business. Are you scared, Rob?" said Fanshaw. "The wind will drop presently."

"He's not a bit scared," said Alan.

"No; why, of course not; who was it said, 'Heaven's no further off by sea than by land'?"

Nobody answered; the darkness was thick, they could scarcely see each other's face. Alan flung one arm round the mast to steady himself, and with the other hand he clutched Rob's collar. The boy laughed.

"You think I can't keep on my feet. How those clouds do scud along! Alan, what are you thinking about?"

"Nothing particular."

"Aren't you? I was thinking at such a rate, and wondering what it will be like. The other world, I mean. Suppose the yacht goes down, and we with it, your arm round my neck, and together we enter the other world, Alan, what will it be like?"

"God knows. I don't."

"Well, it doesn't matter. God will be there."

There was a crash at the far end of the little vessel,

and a noise of falling spars. Fanshaw rushed off, and Alan followed, saying—

“Don’t stir,—hold fast, Rob,” but of the next few moments and all that happened, though much thought over and much discussed, Alan was never able to give the least account. He fancied, but was never entirely certain, that a huge sea broke over the *Jackal*, or that the yacht gave a frightful roll, and plunged into the billows. He believed he lost his footing and rolled on the deck. He knew that his eyes, ears, and mouth were full of salt spray; that there was a deafening sound of creaking planks and flapping cords; of Fanshaw and Fitzacre calling to each other; of the sailors shouting, but amongst and above all he thought he heard his own name, Rob’s voice calling him; then a tumult of much rushing and shouting, a horrible stillness, and Fanshaw’s voice in horrified accents—

“Wyke! Alan! where’s the boy?”

Was it the falling boom that had done it, or the heavy sea that had washed the deck? No one knew. They strained their eyes into the pitchy darkness of the great seething waters below them; they shouted, but no answer came. They did all they could; but as the moments fly, those age-long moments which leave marks on our lives, and the horrible dread becomes a certainty, an awe-struck silence falls on all, and they wait; no longer heeding the storm around them, their hearts dead within them, they wait and watch for the breaking of the day.

Oh, those long hours of darkness and despair, those hours of useless watching, of hopeless gazing into the depths of that pitiless sea! Alan could not think; yet through his brain there rushed a torrent of wild ideas, of frantic fancies with neither sense nor meaning. Long

after all hope was dead, still in his ears there seemed to be ringing a far-away distant cry. Long, long after such a thing could be anyhow possible, he found himself straining his ears to detect this sound of piteous wailing ; he knew not how the hours passed, nor noticed when at last Fanshaw laid a strong hand upon his arm, and half dragged him below, and laid him in his berth. Much loud talk reached his ears, many exclamations of despair ; Fanshaw and Fitzacre in fierce dispute, the sailors grumbling, but he cared nothing, nor listened. Once or twice, in a vague sort of way, he asked himself—

“ Was the vast mystery about to be solved ? Was the great shadow that had stood so many times in his path, that had wrapt so many whom he had loved in its mysterious, cloudlike embrace, about to envelop him also ? Was *he* to be wiped out of the roll of the living ? Was *his* life's story told and done ? ” And for once he asked the question without a shudder ; he was numbed by the great shock that had fallen upon him. Weary of the endless questioning, if the end was near, what mattered it ?—what did he care ?

From thoughts of the lad that had gone, of the bright face now cold and lifeless, of the active form now fathom deep in brine, he turned with shuddering horror ; he *could* not think of him ; and soon he ceased to think at all. The heavy slumber of the senses drenched in sorrow overpowered him, and he lay there cold and motionless, just as he had flung himself down all soaked with the spray, and for a brief space knew nothing of what had befallen.

When next he had any consciousness of passing things, he felt rather than saw that it was light once more, and that the straining and creaking of the boards

of the boat were still ; the yacht must be in still water, or at least the wind must have gone down ; and then he knew that *his* life's story was not told. Alone, not side by side with his friend, had Rob gone into the other world, if such a world there was. But with a loathing horror of looking again at the familiar sights around him, he lay still with closed eyes till Fanshaw and Fitzacre came quietly in, and finding he was awake, began talking in gloomy broken tones of what had happened, and how they had run into Fécamp harbour, and how something must be done. They must telegraph and write to those poor people.

"Horrid thing!—he's her only son, and she's a widow,—such a plucky lad too. I don't believe, Fitz, he knew what fear was,—couldn't frighten him last night, could we, Wyke? Queer though, for he saw the danger, took it all in a minute ; looked Death in the Face, and didn't quail one second. I'm awfully sorry ; never felt so cut up in my life." Then they went off, Fanshaw full of a new misgiving, which Alan's vague, unnoticing gaze had suggested. "What's to be done with the fellow?" he said. "He looks half out of his mind this morning, lying there in his wet clothes, saying nothing. They were such chums, those two. I expected nothing less than tears ; but he looks as if he'd forgotten all about it."

The other had little encouragement to give.

"Better get him ashore, and to a decent bed in a good hotel. Vote we all give up this beastly yacht ; can't think what possessed us to come." And so exceedingly distressed was Captain Fanshaw at the terrible experience of the past night, that he lost no time in following this suggestion ; though whether the next proposal, "And then you and I can go to Paris, and do something

diverting to put this horrible affair out of our heads," was quite so acceptable, may be doubted.

As to Alan, he took small account of what happened. He went ashore when the others did ; but when, after a day or two of gloomy sauntering about at Fécamp, the two elder men declared their intention of going to Paris, and urged him to accompany them, he doggedly refused.

"Let me alone, Fanshaw, I'm in no mood for Paris and sight-seeing. I'll stay here awhile, it doesn't matter where I am, and when I'm tired of it, I'll go to Rouen, or back to London. I tell you I'd rather be alone," and after some argument his two companions left him.

"A sulky dog," said Fitzacre ; but Fanshaw understood the matter better, and made no reply.

And Alan lingered on, giving himself up without restraint to melancholy thoughts. One day he walked in one direction, the next day he turned another way, and all places were alike. He saw nothing around him ; thought of nothing but the sudden close of that bright young life ; and walked ever in the valley of the shadow, shuddering as he gazed at the Face of Death.

After some weeks he shook himself, called himself a fool, packed his clothes in a violent hurry, and went back to London.

## CHAPTER V.

SIR ANDREW'S WIFE.

"Thou art much too fair  
To be death's conquest."

PATTY WYKE was in a very thoughtful mood. It was a condition unusual with her, and could not fail to attract attention. In an ordinary way her time was passed fluttering about the old house from morning to night, busy about first one trifle and then another, and always full of smiles and song. To see her sitting still for any length of time with her hands lying unoccupied in her lap was such a novel event that Lady Wyke had more than once looked up inquiringly from the housewifely employment of adding up tradesmen's bills, to seek an explanation of the strange aspect of her step-daughter.

At last Patty moved, and shook out the folds of her dress with the air of one who has made up her mind and means to act, then rose and walked to the writing-table which stood in the far corner of the room, opened a blotting-book, and began to write.

"DEAR OLD BOY,

"Of course I want to come to you—you do not need to be told that, do you? And your plan of a month together in London is quite to my mind. It

would do you good, for I know quite well how my poor old boy feels after that terribly sad accident at sea ; and it would also do me an immensity of good ; but yet, Alan, I do believe that I ought to stay at home. You will laugh at that word—ought ; but do you remember how you begged me to help *her* ? Well, I must tell you that I have great hopes of her ; she is making a good fight, and somehow I feel as if it would be mean to come away just now and leave her alone. I am torn in two. Yes, really, silly little Patty flatters herself that two people want her. It is all fancy, I dare say, and great conceit on my part ; but if you knew all, I think you would say, stay. And you need not be alone. Don't go into lodgings, but make Aunt Judy put you up,—she is rare company at all times,—and come home soon and help in the fray.

“ Your sister,

“ PATTY WYKE.”

Thus far she wrote, then, as was her wont, added a postscript as long as the letter, but there was nothing particular in it that need be recorded. Wise people have an objection to postscripts, and Patty had a prejudice against wise people, and so made it a principle to add a postscript to every letter she wrote. Then she fastened up her letter, addressed it, and leaning back in her chair without being observed, devoted a few minutes to a careful scrutiny of her companion. “ Only a little more than a month, and how worried she looks ! ” was her mental comment. “ No, I won't go and leave her. Heigho ! but it would have been delicious.” Then she took up her letter, and went up-stairs to the house-keeper's room,—“ my fellow-conspirator,” she said to herself.



"I've given it up, Nan," she exclaimed, as the old woman looked up at her entrance from some stockings she was darning, and greeted her with a smile. "Give me a pat on the back, for I am sure I deserve it."

"And why did you give it up, Miss Patty?—did Sir Andrew bid you bide at home?"

"Not he indeed, nurse, you know better."

"You're a wilful bairn; ay, Miss Patty, but it's a fearful thing to set your own father at nought."

"Nancy Pudsey, you're an old hypocrite; look at me, there's a laugh in your wicked old eyes, I know there is. Tell me, you bad woman, where should I have been now had Sir Andrew had a dutiful daughter in me?"

"Ah me, don't ask; he's had dutiful wives enow and to spare. How is Lady Wyke to-day, the dear?"

"She's worrying over those butcher's books. Nurse, you heard it all yesterday?"

"Yes; there's a deal of waste all round; too many towels sent to the wash, meat far too plentiful, coals flung into the ashpit, and the mistress to set it all to rights. What did she say, Miss Patty?"

"Nothing at all till it had gone on all the morning, and broke out again at lunch before the new servants; then she suddenly turned fearfully white, and just waiting till we three were alone, she said—'Sir Andrew, if your household has fallen into such a state of disorder, I must ask you to reform it, the task is quite beyond my power,' and then walked majestically out of the room; but she went up-stairs and had a long cry, I could see it by her eyes when she came down to tea; but Sir Andrew was astonished for once in his life."

"Yes, that was he. He gave me notice, and cook too; but we don't notice that noways, Miss Patty, we're used to it."

"I should think so. What did cook say?"

"Just nothing at all but 'I'll fry his bacon for him.' And as for the towels, Miss Patty, we'll let him save in the washing of his, and the men will see that his study fire is kept low."

"He's begun to plague about her dress now," said Patty; "that pretty dead-leaf plush, that you and I like so much, is not to be worn any more on any account, it is quite the wrong thing; but it is the prettiest dress she has, and he knows it."

"What may she wear then, my dear? The cashmere that she put on last Sunday was all wrong, for she told me so. 'Mrs. Pudsey,' she said, in her pretty shy way, 'do you think this dress so very unbecoming? Sir Andrew doesn't like it.' And there was that anxious look in her large sad eyes, and that little tremble round her mouth which it makes me mad to see."

Patty leant her chin on her hand and looked thoughtful.

"What did you say, Nan?"

"That it was just a dress to suit her, and that she mustn't mind Sir Andrew's fads, he didn't know his own mind about ladies' dress or aught else; and she tried to laugh, but it wouldn't come."

"Nurse, nurse, you had better tell her all—fore-warned is fore-armed."

"Tell her what, my child?"

"All, everything, just what *you* know and I know—the truth, and nothing but the truth. How he only marries to spite other people; how Alan's mother was Mr. Gilpin's one and only love; how my mother was more than half betrothed, and how Sir Andrew came between and spoiled two lives by half-a-dozen words of scandal; and how the same story might be told of others, and how—— But no; don't tell her that he never thought

of her until he heard me say that Alan was half in love with her. No ; don't tell her that, goose that I was to say it."

"Miss Patty, who tells you these old stories?"

"Oh, one and another. Was ever a girl so luckless as I? But oh, if I'd had a father like other girls, wouldn't I have worshipped him! But never mind, Nan, I can laugh and sing still. If I could only teach her to laugh too!—yes, laugh at his follies, then maybe they wouldn't drive her demented. But she mayn't laugh—that's another thing she mustn't do—it is not befitting her position."

The old woman's eyes met Patty's, and filled with tears.

"I've heard that before in this house," she said. "Miss Patty, make her laugh."

"I will, Nan,—yes, that I will. Yesterday we had a rare laugh upon the hillside. Oh! didn't I tell you we'd settled to walk up the hill after lunch? I wanted exercise and so did she—but, simpleton that I am, I mentioned it at lunch before Sir Andrew, and of course it must not be,—too fatiguing for my lady; and when my lady said she wished it, that quite settled the matter. 'No, my love, the horses need exercise, I must ask you to drive to-day, you walk too much by far,' and so we said no more. But I told Jacob to drive straight up the hillside. He stared, and drove about a hundred yards, and then stopped and asked if he hadn't misunderstood my meaning, the carriage really couldn't go that way; and I said, 'No, of course not,' and out we jumped and ran away over the turf and stones like mad things, and Jacob stared at us, and waited for ever so long to see if we weren't coming back; and then I suppose he went home, for he wasn't there when we came down two hours after."

"And did Sir Andrew hear nothing about it?"

"Nan, you old hypocrite, don't pretend you don't know what happened. Of course he knew, and of course he worried on all dinner-time about it, and of course the men giggled, and Lady Wyke turned white and red, and I, why, I laughed—I never can help it. I wish I could think of something else to do, for poor Lady Wyke was dropping quiet tears over her knitting in the drawing-room afterwards."

There was a long silence after this narration. Old Mrs. Pudsey stitched away without looking up, Patty settled herself in a rocking-chair by the window, saying, "They have gone out driving together this afternoon, so I may as well stay here, this is the cosiest room in the house," and then she too relapsed into meditation, and it was long before either of them spoke again. When they did it was of Alan, his journey, when he was likely to return, of the sad accident on the yacht, and how melancholy it would make him.

The short day was closing in when Patty said—

"There's the carriage; I must go and see whether there is a nice fire in the drawing-room. Ah, she has put on that pretty hat of hers—what pains she takes to please him!—but it's a mistake out and out," and she tripped away down the broad stairs to the entrance-hall, intent on that which had been her chief thought since her early years—how to coax back a smile to a weary heart-sick face.

But it was not a sad or weary face that Patty saw as Lady Wyke entered, but a face almost livid with passion, eyes which glowed and sparkled with an angry fire, lips that quivered with agony or agitation. Sir Andrew was speaking in calm measured tones. Patty knew well the

sarcastic emphasis, the lofty superiority of manner, and in a moment could have told the whole history of that drive. Lady Wyke tossed her head and gave some brief reply, and then Sir Andrew turned suddenly round and swore at her—as if she had been a dog, thought Patty, and her cheek burned with indignation. But though Patty had seen strange scenes in her young life—scenes so sad, so piteous, that they had burnt themselves in upon her memory—she was quite unprepared for what followed. Lady Wyke had flung down her cloak in the hall, and was preparing to mount the stairs when the cruel words fell on her ears. With set teeth and flaming eyes she turned round and faced her husband, and flung them back at him.

“Yes, swore at him she did,” said the butler and footman to each other; “and she, so gentle and quiet—who’d have thought it?—but there, a worm will turn! And Sir Andrew, did you see, sneaked off, quite quiet and cowed-like, to his study?—and I hope as his fire’s out, and he’s mortal cold. ’Twill be a lesson to him. I hope he’ll put it in his pipe and smoke it.”

And Patty, startled, and half frightened at this new aspect of affairs, stood still, and stared after her step-mother, as Lady Wyke went rapidly and silently to her own room. She lingered for a minute or two, then, seeing the footman gazing at her in a helpless paralyzed fashion, she bade him bring tea at once; and without stopping to think whether she was wanted, ran softly up-stairs, and followed her step-mother into her room. Lady Wyke had not heard her step. She had walked straight to her dressing-table, and was gazing intently at herself in her mirror, as if desirous to discover what traces the late conflict had left on her countenance. She was made suddenly aware of Patty’s presence by the

reflection of her bright face looking over her shoulder, and turning quickly, said—

“Go and give your father his tea, Patty; I am not coming down just now.”

She spoke in a cold constrained manner, and turned her head away, but when the girl put her arms round her, and then began gently to unfasten her mantle, a kind of shudder passed through her. She made a gesture as if she would resist these kindly impulses; then, suddenly changing her mind, and abandoning all attempt at reserve and self-restraint, she exclaimed vehemently—

“Go away, Patty, I tell you; I want to be alone,—no, let my boots alone, I can take them off myself. Don’t stay here or I shall—— There’s no knowing what I shall do or say. I am beside myself.”

“You dear,” said Patty simply, “you want your tea, I know you do, and there’s a lovely fire in the drawing-room. Now, sit down one minute, and let me pull off your boots. Yes, but I really must. Oh, how cold you are! You oughtn’t to drive such cold days, a good walk would have done you ever so much more good.”

“Patty, I’m a fiend.”

“Oh no, you’re a dear, not to be angry with me for being in the way down-stairs just now. It was stupid of me, but you needn’t mind.”

“I never thought of your doing *that*,” the girl went on meditatively, “but after all it wasn’t a bad idea. I shouldn’t wonder if it succeeds.”

“Nothing will succeed,” said Lady Wyke gloomily. “Nothing can make it better; but go away, Patty—I tell you, you must.”

“But you are coming too. I can’t leave you here in the cold fretting about Sir Andrew and his fads. I have often thought how much better we might have got on

here, if only they hadn't been so soft, if they hadn't gone in for love, and such ideas as one finds in books."

"They?" said Lady Wyke, with a world of questions in her eyes, and a half-scared glance round the room.

"Yes," said Patty, with some hesitation in her manner; "you mustn't mind my way of speaking, I've been so badly brought up, you know. I mean Sir Andrew's wives. They'd read novels, I suppose, and looked for love and kindness; and perhaps they'd had nice homes where people cared for them. You see, I don't know anything about that kind of thing. I've had to stand up for myself all my life, and he knows it, and we're used to each other, and I don't get on so much amiss after all."

Lady Wyke's heart suggested that such a fashion of "getting on" was not entirely seemly according to her ideas, but the thought rapidly followed that there might be even a worse way of getting on, and she contented herself with replying rather coldly—

"But I am not like you, Patty, and unfortunately my circumstances are rather different."

"Ah, yes," said the girl, nothing daunted, "no doubt you are different—twenty times as clever. You could not be as silly as I am to save your life. But yet I do believe it might save your life if you could be just a trifle silly sometimes. Oh, do try, Lady Wyke, just to please me."

"Try what? Patty, what a strange girl you are!"

"Just try not to take life so much in earnest. Laugh when you feel inclined to cry—that's what I've been doing all my life, and now I've learnt to see the queer side of everything, and it helps me wonderfully. You don't see it, but Sir Andrew *is* very funny sometimes. All the stuff he talks about position and dignity, the agony he suffers if you sit on the rug or speak above

your breath, or move too quickly ; the way he goes on about your dresses, abusing the pretty ones, and liking those that you and I don't fancy ; all his tirades about the sin of using so many lucifer matches, and wasting money on telegrams, etc., etc. All this worries you and wears you out, but I don't think any more about it than about the wind howling in the chimney. I sit on the rug all day long, sing and race up and down stairs, wear all the dresses he hates, and laugh at the notion that he has any idea what's proper or nice. And oh, dear Lady Wyke, if you'll only do the same, we'll keep such a cheery house as has never been known here as long as I can remember, and you'll be young and pretty for twenty years to come. Now do begin at once. Put on your lovely brown plush, and then he'll see there's to be no surrender. Why, here comes Nan. Nan, I'm coaxing Lady Wyke to put on her lovely brown dress to-night—that dress Sir Andrew can't bear because it makes him so mad to think he isn't a woman. But I'm going to make him have her painted in that dress ; it's the prettiest thing she has. What will you bet that I don't succeed ?”



## CHAPTER VI.

### MISS JUDITH WYKE.

"Afraid, she saith, and yet 'tis true,  
That what man dreads he still should view ;  
Should do the thing he fears to do,  
And storm the ghosts in ambuscade."—INGELOW.

SOME twenty years before the date of the events we have been relating, two maiden sisters of Sir Andrew Wyke had been inmates of the Lowes ; but having fallen out with their brother, after much plain speaking on both sides, they had received notice to quit ; and not being so inured to this experience as Mrs. Pudsey and Mrs. Grimes and others of the household, they had packed up their goods and chattels, and had taken their leave of Sir Andrew and his motherless little son, and had gone to make themselves a new home in London. Why they had chosen the great city for their home was briefly explained by Miss Wyke—"A place as unlike our dale as possible is what I want." And certainly the house in Westminster, under the shadow of the old abbey, and close to the ever-flowing stream of busy life, was as unlike as could be imagined to the old grey country house at the foot of those silent mountains, whose vast stillness was seldom broken by any sound but that of the rushing stream, or the plover's plaintive cry.

It was to this London home, where reigned the Aunt

Judy whom Patty had described as "always the best of company," that Alan betook him on his return from that miserable yachting excursion to the coast of Normandy. November and fogs had taken complete possession of the metropolis when he arrived there; and the blackness around him, when he issued from Charing Cross Station, made him hesitate for a moment as to whether he should not change his purpose, and seek a clearer, brighter atmosphere among his native hills, instead of lingering longer in such a world of gloom and shadow.

But only for a moment. He had no heart to go home just then. Sir Andrew's sneers at his feebleness of purpose, Patty's merry raillery, as she reminded him of her prophecy, all rose before his imagination; and London he decided should be tried, for a time at least.

Possibly while there he might come to some conclusion as to the perplexing question of his future career.

Miss Judith Wyke was expecting her nephew, having been warned by a series of telegrams that he was intending to favour her with a visit. They seldom wrote to each other, though they were excellent friends; he preferred the save-trouble system of telegraphic communication; she, in like manner, favoured it, though from very different motives. Telegrams were simple and straightforward—"no stuff and nonsense about them"—stuff and nonsense being Miss Judith's abhorrence. Letters, she often averred, conveyed no ideas to her mind, but telegrams were occasionally perfectly intelligible. Her sister, cast by nature in a more romantic and gentler mould, was wont to remark plaintively that telegrams were unsympathetic, and decidedly expensive; but Miss Judith sternly replied, "Truth at any cost"—for if it had no other advantage, a telegram obliged her

to tell none of the stereotyped lies about love and kind regards, affection and sincerity; and poor Miss Faith quailed under the implied rebuke, and murmured that, "after all, love and affection were very sweet things." Whereupon Miss Judith exclaimed, "Sweet things—nonsense!" and banged the door.

"Aunt Judy's society is a severe mental tonic," Alan had more than once remarked to his sister, and it was with some shrinking from the anticipation of the spiritual bracing before him that he found himself entering her abode. I am inclined to suspect that he comforted himself with the thought of Aunt Faith as a resource, if Aunt Judy should be in one of her grimly unrelenting moods.

"Well, here you are," was Miss Wyke's greeting. She did not rise or lay aside her needlework, or even put out her hand to meet his, but she submitted to receive his kiss on her cheek without any show of annoyance, and this Alan took as a hopeful sign. Miss Faith had met him on the threshold of the house with a warm embrace; but after all Miss Faith was nobody—the comfort of the visitor depended mainly on her sister's will and pleasure; therefore it was that the lines on Miss Judy's face, the puckers round Miss Judy's strong, firm mouth, the tones of Miss Judy's voice, were matters of most anxious consideration to the inmates of that comfortable, well-ordered house.

Miss Faith might—in fact she generally did—keep up a constant ripple of smiles and meaningless small-talk, which served to cover some awkwardly expressive paroxysms of silence on Miss Judy's part. But no one heeded these well-meaning efforts any more than the purring of a cat on the hearthrug; but the few words which fell from her elder sister seldom passed unnoticed,

and if a smile broke over her strong, calm face, it was a sight to be remembered.

"How handsome she is!" people always remarked when Miss Judith Wyke was mentioned. Alan had often thought so, and never oftener than on that winter evening, when the strangely different trio sat together, and carried on a fragmentary style of conversation, which brought out in strong relief the characteristics of each.

Miss Faith had opened it by the natural request: "Tell us all you saw in France, Alan." But Miss Judith, with a keen perception of the pain with which he looked back on his recent expedition, had added, "You saw nothing, did you, Alan?—so don't pretend you did."

"Then tell us about the Lowes, and the new Lady Wyke—dear me, we *were* surprised, Alan."

"No, we weren't; speak the truth, Faith."

"Oh, I meant we should have been surprised if we hadn't been quite certain it would happen. People always say they are surprised when they hear of weddings, don't they?"

"I don't," said Miss Judith; whereupon Miss Faith took refuge in a nervous little laugh, and Alan tried to give some account of his new step-mother, and of the family doings since he had last seen his aunts. He was perfectly aware that while listening to him, and throwing in her strange interjections and abrupt comments, Aunt Judy was inspecting him all round, and taking stock of his bodily and mental condition in a way peculiar to herself.

By and by Miss Faith went away to receive a visitor, who had asked for a few minutes' private interview, and Alan and Miss Judith were left alone.

"The curate, I suppose," Alan had remarked, and Miss Judith had replied "Of course," with a toss of her head that sent her lace cap perilously on one side. The reader may wonder, and possibly indulge in some bitter feelings towards Miss Judith Wyke on account of this contemptuous action of hers; and it may therefore be well to explain that "curates," taken as a whole, and some few in particular, were a crook in Miss Judith's lot. "I don't blame *them* particularly," she would remark, "it is Faith who won't keep them in their place, and so we're never free of them; there's always one standing on the mat in the hall, or sitting with his feet on the fender in the dining-room, or lounging in graceful attitudes about the drawing-room." Miss Faith, for we would also set her right with our readers, had her reasons for this little weakness. Though faded and elderly at the date of our story, she had been young once, and had had a love-story of her own in those far-away days, a love-story in which a curate had figured most disastrously for her peace of mind. He had disappeared, where or how no one had taken the trouble to ascertain or chronicle, Miss Faith's relations not being specially interested in him; but he had left a mark on the poor lady's life which resulted in inspiring her with a harmless craze for curates, and a delusion that she was engaged to the particular curate who ministered at the church where she was in the habit of worshipping. The changes that occurred every year or two were apparently of no moment, Miss Faith's troth was plighted to the curate, whoever he might be; and this innocent delusion was now considered chronic, and her relatives fully accepted the situation, though Miss Judith was unable at all times to acquiesce in the consequences of her sister's mania with perfect resignation. "If they

weren't such a set of imbeciles it would be less intolerable ; but there, it amuses Faith, so why should I trouble my head about the matter ? The trousseau interests her and keeps her quiet, and the night schools and clothing clubs are excellent in their way."

"Yes," she answered to Alan's inquiry ; "it's the curate, of course."

"Does he realize his position ?" Alan inquired.

"I haven't told him yet. I keep that as a last resource," she answered ; "but never mind them, it's a weary subject. What's the matter with you ?"

"With me, Aunt Judy ?"

"Yes, with you."

He was startled with her sudden question.

"Do I look out of sorts ?" he asked. "Perhaps it's sea-sickness. We had a horrid passage."

She looked at him with stern disapprobation, her keen grey eyes scanning him intently ; then she shook her head.

"Speak the truth, Alan, or I won't have you in my house."

He left his station before the fire, and flung himself into a low chair by her side, but did not speak. She looked at him again, no softening in the expression of her face, which seemed to Alan to tell of contempt and impatience. He knew that look of old ; it had always made him feel ashamed of himself, and it did so now.

"You are discontented," she said, seeing that he was not disposed to speak. "No, don't deny it. It's the fashion, I know, for young men and young women to march about looking dismal, and talking as if the world were not good enough to be honoured with their presence. Is that it, Alan ? Speak out,—don't be ashamed to be in the fashion."

"Nothing of the kind, Aunt Judy; the world is a very good sort of place as far as I can see."

"What's the matter, then? Your father's married again. More fool he,—but that's nothing new."

"No, indeed."

"And your sister likes the new Lady Wyke. So much the better. Alan, speak out,—don't make me waste so many words on you."

"Aunt Judy, I've nothing to tell."

"That's false. You have to answer my question."

"What's the use?"

"Answer me."

"Aunt Judy, long ago, when I was a lad——"

"What are you now?"

He smiled.

"I used to make my moan to you when I was a school-boy, Aunt Judy, and you always said, 'Fie, for shame,—be a man!' I am a man, but things remain the same."

She turned upon him with something like contempt; he met her gaze with a dreary sort of smile, and said—

"Oh, I know all you would say. I despise myself, but I cannot make myself different."

"You can. Get something to do, and give over dreaming."

"Something to do? Yes, that I will."

"And what is it to be?"

"Shall I be a curate? Aunt Faith, at least, would be kind to me then."

"You'd be as imbecile as the rest of them. No; that won't suit you. Why, you have been studying medicine for ever so long,—are you going to give it up?"

"No; I'm going in for it heart and soul,—I really am, Aunt Judy."

"I don't believe it."

"I'm going to see an old friend at Guy's to-morrow; perhaps they'll give me something to do,—powders to mix, or bottles to wash. And then I'll take lodgings in one of the slums, and be as dismal as I like all by myself, with no Aunt Judy to scowl at me."

"That you won't—you'll come and live here."

"I should be in your way, and in the curate's way. Aunt Judy, hasn't he been here long enough? Shall I go and turn him out?"

"No; here comes Faith,—the creature has departed early to-night."

And Miss Faith entered, quite a pretty flush of animation about her usually pale faded face. She had had a delightful half-hour, and was full of charity towards all the world. Alan must make Mr. O'Flaherty's acquaintance—a most delightful man, one of a thousand, which drew from Miss Judith some unsympathetic demonstrations, and before long Alan announced that he had a headache, and would go to bed.

It was not Miss Judith's practice to go to bed until she was sleepy; and though Miss Faith had a superstition that eleven o'clock was the correct hour for retiring, on this particular evening she lingered so long after her usual time, that her sister at last inquired, in her straightforward fashion—

"What's the matter, Faith? Why don't you take yourself off?"

"Well, I suppose it's wrong to sit up so late; but I was thinking, Judith, and the time slipped by,—that poor boy, what can be the matter with him?"



"Don't call him poor. There's nothing the matter with him but fancies."

"Oh, if you're sure of that, Judith, it will be quite a weight off my mind. Seeing him to-night, with that restless, fidgety way of his, brought back that last year at the Lowes, and his poor mother. Oh, Judith, did we do all we could for her, do you think? When I remember how nervous she was before Alan was born, and how Andrew tormented her, laughing at her, and yet worrying her till she could hardly bear to think of her child at all; and when I recall that last night, and how she cried and sobbed, and said she couldn't die, and she wouldn't die, begging us to save her, I wonder and wonder if we might have done more than we did."

"Where's the use?" said Miss Judy grimly.

"And then I say to myself, maybe we ought to have stayed at the Lowes, and tried to make a happy home for Alan,—we came away so hastily, Judith."

"Would you stay where you were not wanted?" asked her sister.

"And then," continued Miss Faith, who never seemed to hear a question, "when I look at Alan, and see his mother's eyes again, I always hear that cry, 'I can't die, I won't die,' and I wonder if she left that fear with him to haunt him all his days."

"I've a notion that Adam bequeathed that fear to most of us—some more, some less," Miss Judith replied.

"Adam?—Adam who?" inquired Miss Faith absently.

"Well, he's mentioned in the Old Testament. I thought you might have heard of him."

But Miss Faith was intent on her own train of thought, and went on dreamily—

"And then Patty's mother died—such a pity—and he lost that dog he was so fond of, and the two last

step-mothers, whose names I never can remember—I forget whether it was poisoned or run over—the dog, I mean—one of the two fell down-stairs, and was never well afterward. I know you think, Judith, that Andrew pushed her down-stairs; and the one who caught her death of cold, because he had a craze for saving, and wouldn't have any fires till the snow was deep on the ground. Yes, it has been a sad home for the boy, nothing but deaths and funerals; and then this boy, tumbling overboard and spoiling his trip—some people are so inconsiderate."

"Faith, go to bed, you're dreaming!" broke in Miss Judith, and her sister, startled at the sharp tone of her voice, jumped up and went off without another word.

Left to herself, Judith Wyke stirred the fire, put her feet on the fender, and settled herself to her meditations. An old maid's meditations, what can they possibly be worth? Little enough maybe, yet as those midnight vigils were the moments when Miss Judith was most truly herself, if we are inclined to make her acquaintance, we must needs bear her company for a brief space in her solitude.

Circumstances had, as it were, forced Judith to encase herself in an armour of self-restraint and hard-heartedness, which she flattered herself imposed on her fellow-creatures.

"They think me a brute—and it saves me a deal of trouble—for if Faith had any idea, poor thing, that I had the least compassion for her follies, what peace should I have? And as for this boy, if I let him think I pitied him for all the ill luck which has made him what he is, he would take it into his head that he has a right to go through life a doleful do-nought and care-for-nought." So ruminated Miss Judith. "I am

driven to it," she said ; but it was hypocrisy, and she knew it.

Not Miss Faith, with her soft romance and pathetic remembrances and regrets, had half the heartache which always oppressed Miss Judith when she recalled the sad little life-story which had had its ending with Alan's birth ; and though more than twenty years had rolled away since his girl-mother had gone so unwillingly to her grave, the trembling agony which had looked out of her frightened eyes till they grew dim in death was still to her one of the most heartrending pictures which memory could call back.

"And the same terror haunts him,—it is her legacy, as Faith says," said Miss Judith to herself ; "and I, what shall I say to him ? Bid him forget—put the thought from him as most people do,—or tell him to face it like a man ? Shall I say, 'It's folly and madness to spoil your life thinking about the end' ? No ; where's the good in such reasoning as that ? Why talk like a fool, as if I knew no better way ? But how to manage the boys and girls of this present age, who think it so magnificent to believe nothing, that is the question. Then, moreover, I am a woman ; and women, so men say, find it easy to believe. Ah, what do they know ? Easy to believe !—would I could say so ! But he will think it,—he does think it, no doubt ; and my faith, such as it is, will seem to him but fond and blind credulity. I am growing old too, and have none of the new lights, so I must tread warily ; my reasoning will be antiquated, my belief and trust nothing but a child's. A child's !—would to God it were !"

She clasped her hands behind her head as she leaned back in her chair, and broke forth passionately—

"Easy to believe ! My God, it is all too hard. Thou biddest us not be afraid,—in Thy Father's house are many

mansions. Thou sayest, 'He that believeth hath everlasting life:' and 'because I live, ye shall live also.' It has a pleasant sound, yet what does it mean? We see the end of this busy, all-engrossing life, the silence, the grave; we see, we know that one moment we are here, the next away, and no voice comes from the dreadful stillness to say that all is not over,—that there is life beyond. We stand and watch the spirit's passing, and say to each other, 'He is better off, we would not call him back'; but yet, as Alan says so bitterly, 'we are glad in our heart of hearts that we are still left, and we tell ourselves that for *us*, no doubt, there remains many years of the old familiar life, many years more of the well-loved round of occupations, of treading the accustomed streets, and meeting of old friends and old acquaintances.' We hug ourselves, and cry to Death, 'Not yet, not yet.' And why? Just because we are not sure of the life beyond. Is it easy? For some, maybe; never for me,—no, never. And yet, Alan, there *is* for you and for me one cure for that haunting doubt, that overpowering fear; there *is* a power that will drive away the shadows and make it possible to live, and not impossible to die."

Was Miss Judith heartless and cold? I would that those who met her in society, and heard her blunt speech, and laughed at her upright bearing and determined walk, could have seen her in these quiet midnight hours, taking counsel with herself how best to aid a soul in its strait. That they could have seen how that fine face softened into tenderness; those keen grey eyes moistened with sympathetic tears; how that strong mouth quivered and trembled as she realized, with her vast power of sympathy, the writhings of that anguished heart. "Easy to believe!" she reiterated. "People say so; but what

sort of beings can they be?—how bred and nurtured? I know nothing of them. Can they be of the same flesh and blood as I, as Alan, who, God have pity on us, must fight our way to Peace, and who, I often think, will refuse to believe it if we find ourselves safe at last? Easy to believe indeed!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### LITTLE RIE.

"Her eyes are stars of twilight fair,  
Like twilight too her dusky hair ;  
And all things else about her drawn  
From May time and the cheerful dawn."

WORDSWORTH.

ALAN WYKE had done wisely when he turned his steps in the direction of his aunt's comfortable house at Westminster, for though he called the far-off dale in Westmoreland his home, there could be no doubt that the London house was more truly home to him, if home means, as it surely does, the place where we feel most at ease and at our best. There he met with no jarring element. Even Miss Faith's little foibles were sacred in his eye ; there was something so soft and soothing about her gentle movements, her manner was so womanly and sympathetic, her dress so refined and fragrant with sweet scents, that he felt her to be a comfortable and comforting presence in the house ; while Miss Judith was the embodiment of life and energy, and of all the hopeful courage that Alan found lacking in himself.

How two women could find so much to do was a perpetual perplexity to him. From morning to night, each in her own peculiar way was ceaselessly employed. "In our little labours of love," Miss Faith would say, with a pretty pink flush on her soft white cheeks. "In meddling with our neighbours' affairs," was Miss Judith's

blunt explanation ; and Alan understood that there are more ways than one of describing the same thing.

"You'll be so good as not to fill the house with smoke this afternoon?" Aunt Judy said one day. "We've no end of people coming to stitch and talk, and it mightn't please some of them."

"Stitch and talk,—what does that mean?" her nephew inquired, and his gentler aunt took up the task of explanation.

"A sewing meeting, Alan, to make clothes for the poor. Oh, you've no idea of the distress at this season. Mr. O'Flaherty tells such piteous tales."

"Gross exaggerations," blurted out Miss Judith.

"Oh, Judith, don't say so. I really don't think he ever exaggerates,—he would think it quite wrong."

"It doesn't matter," replied her sister ; "the people like to stitch and talk, and it's a harmless amusement."

"How long does it last?" asked Alan—"and why can't they sew at home?"

"That's a question I've asked myself more than once, but the answer is not forthcoming. Faith always says, 'Oh, they wouldn't,' and she knows best."

"And this evening, aunt, what's the excitement to be then?"

"Faith's going to a magic-lantern performance. I'm due at Lady Turle's 'At Home'—you'll go with me. Nice woman, Lady Turle. I always take the boys and girls there. Now you'd better take yourself off, or you'll be trampled to death by the crowd. I wish you'd get something to do, you're always in the way."

This was the invariable wind-up of Miss Wyke's conversations with her nephew—"I wish you'd get something to do," while Miss Faith softly murmured—

"Yes, dear Alan, for it is so very true, as Dr. Johnson

or Sir Walter Scott said, 'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.'"

Whereupon Miss Judith broke in—

"Oh, bother!—don't lay all the blame on Satan. Alan will get into mischief enough without any help from him;" which flippant remark was heard by Miss Faith with a sigh, and the gentle suggestion—

"Judith dear, I wish you'd talk to Mr. O'Flaherty. I'm afraid you have doubts, and he is so good and sound," a hint to which the elder sister paid but small attention.

And after these little skirmishes, which Alan much enjoyed, the young man would wander forth into the streets to ruminate on the question of getting something to do, which ruminations led him at last to consult the friend he had mentioned at Guy's Hospital; and thenceforward—as his friend chanced to be one of those who are ever on the look-out to bring workmen and work together—Alan ceased to be one of the unemployed, to the great satisfaction of all who wished him well.

Miss Judith indulged in some wonderings as to what they could possibly find for him to do, and when her sister reminded her that he had studied and passed ever so many examinations, she calmly replied—

"So has that dirty imp that you have brought into the house to clean the boots, and much good they have done him."

"But Alan doesn't want to clean boots, does he?" said Miss Faith, bewildered. "I dare say, sister, he could cut a leg off very well indeed. I have often thought that must be quite a simple operation, if it wasn't for the bleeding. Bleeding always flurries me so, especially if it won't stop."

Miss Judith sighed.



"It's not a very clean profession," Miss Faith continued, "and Alan has such nice hands."

Miss Judith knitted furiously.

"When one comes to think of it, one might almost as well be a butcher. Really it does seem a pity. Alan always seems so refined, and as to asking to look at my tongue or examine my throat, why, he never did such a thing in his life, and I can't believe he would. Doctors are so indelicate ; and some, I believe, are quite blood-thirsty."

Miss Judith fidgeted on her chair, and coughed vehemently.

"Really, Judith, I wouldn't do that if I were you. Alan will be wanting to prescribe for you, and he's so young—he'll be as likely as not to poison you. Indeed, I'm getting quite nervous about having him in the house. Lady Turle said the other day——"

"Never mind Lady Turle, you and she don't understand each other. If Alan poisons me, you can turn him out of the house."

"But in the meantime," continued Miss Faith, "he may be trying experiments on me. He may be a chloroformist, or a mesmerist, or a thought-reader, and where should we be then?"

"Much where we are now, I imagine."

"I can't think why he wanted to be a doctor," Miss Faith lamented, having fairly frightened herself with her own imaginings. "Suppose he leaves some of his horrid bottles about, and cook tastes them. I know she steals my pills. Or suppose Jimmy Fell gets playing with his knives and lancets, and cuts an artery and bleeds to death, what would his mother say? She is devoted to the boy, though you never would believe it. Dear me, it's a frightful risk—why must he be a doctor?"

"Why indeed?" said Alan, who entered the room at this instant. "Really, Aunt Faith, I don't know. But I'll try not to poison anybody."

"Oh, my dear boy, do pray be careful. Only imagine, you might be hanged. How painful it would be!"

"Faith, I thought you had some choir-boys coming to-night. Pray don't keep them waiting, or they'll be playing leap-frog in the dining-room, and spoiling the carpet."

Miss Faith, thus admonished, departed, and her sister, breathing a sigh of relief, turned to Alan and said—

"By the bye, you never told me what put this idea into your head? Somehow I never imagined that you were going in seriously for any profession at all. Your father doesn't wish it, does he?"

"Aunt Judy, you will say I am morbid rather than serious when I tell you that my chief motive in taking up the medical profession is to try and look my enemy in the face—the same kind of idea as that which makes a monk keep a skull and a coffin in his cell. Perhaps it is absurd—I hardly know how it will succeed. I shall see. Hitherto I have tried to escape from the thought of it. It seems useless; so I am determined I will know all I can of it, see it in every shape, and, if I can, accustom myself to it, and learn to think of it without fear."

Miss Judith shook her head.

"You think I cannot?"

"Never mind what I think. What have you been doing to-day?"

"Seeing many strange things—a long and ticklish kind of operation, and so many sadly painful sights, that this life seems a greater mystery than ever. Coming

here to-night, I had a small adventure, and tried a little doctoring on my own account."

"Go on."

"I was coming through a narrow and filthy street near St. Crispin's, in Southwark, when a child ran out of a house, tumbled up against me, and measured its length on the pavement. Of course I picked it up. It was crying so lustily that it was some time before I could find out whether it was hurt; but at last, amid a perfect storm of sobs, I drew from it the cause of its trouble. I call the child *it*, but I believe it was a boy about four years old. 'He was running to find mammy,' he said, 'because baby had fallen into the fire, and was burnt; but he didn't know where mammy was, and baby would die.' I wanted, of course, to see the baby, and it was not hard to induce him to come back and show me the way. 'Was nobody with baby?' I asked. 'Yes; the lady had come from the room down-stairs—the lady who helps sick folks,' and so discoursing, we climbed a dark dirty stair, and discovered the burnt baby wailing in the said lady's lap. At first I had a notion that she was an inhabitant of some other part of the house. The skirt of her dress was turned up in charwoman-fashion, and she had a large apron round her, and her hair was not very smooth. But when she spoke I soon found out my mistake. I suppose she was a district visitor, or some sister of mercy who happened to be in the house. She was trying with very gentle fingers to examine the poor baby's hurts, but when I appeared she desisted, saying, 'A doctor—oh, what a blessing!' Do I really look like a doctor, Aunt Judy?"

"Not a bit. A chemist's errand-boy would be called a doctor in such a place, no doubt. Well, what did you do between you?"

"We begged some oil and rags from another family in the wretched house—it seemed to be let out in rooms, a room to a family—and bandaged up the little burned arms and hands. I don't think the injuries were severe, and the child was crying itself to sleep in its kind nurse's arms, when I undertook to hunt up the mother and send her home. The small boy hung down his head and muttered that he did not know where she was, when the young lady tried to insist upon his finding her. 'It isn't true,' she said; 'Ben does know where she is, but the fact is, he is afraid to go. She is sure to be at the gin-shop just at the end of the street. I only hope she is not very drunk, for I can't stay here much longer.'"

"So you betook yourself to the gin-shop to find her? I can quite imagine you escorting her home."

Alan made no reply to this remark, except to observe—

"It was shabby of me to leave that girl to tackle the woman alone, but she looked so resolute and capable, it did not enter my head she could need any help. I had better have taken the child to the hospital."

"Who is the girl?"

"I haven't the least idea. How should I know?"

"Describe her, will you?"

"No, that I can't. It was getting dark, and as the window of the room opened on a high dead wall, very little light was obtained through it, even if it had been clean, and she was standing with her back to the window most part of the time I was talking to her. She had very well-shaped, capable-looking hands, rather a pale complexion, and rather peculiar eyes, I think; but really I scarcely noticed her. But why do you ask?"

"Why? Oh, because I know a girl who visits in Southwark, and goes about her work rather in the style

this young lady you met seems to do—turns up her skirt, and sweeps out the old women's rooms, makes their beds, washes their children, and acts sick-nurse and charwoman alternately. But you must know her too, Alan. She is niece to that parson in Langdale, Stephen Gilpin, whom you have known all your days. Her mother was his sister ;—silly thing ! she married a curate, and died, of course, when this child was a baby. Why, you must have played with little Rie here many a time years ago."

"I don't believe the girl I saw to-day was little Rie, though I've only a vague remembrance of her. It is years since I saw her, Aunt Judy. Patty was talking of her not long ago, and wondering what had become of her."

"She comes here often enough. She is *little* Rie still, though she prefers her full name. I will send her a line and ask her to tea, and you can renew your acquaintance, and see if she is your heroine of this afternoon."

"Don't tell her I thought she was a charwoman."

"Why not ? I don't suppose she'll ever be anything half so useful."

"Aunt Judy, you're severe ; what's gone wrong to-day ? Is that O'Flaherty droning away in the dining-room ? Does he come with the choir-boys ?"

"He's been here only *three times* to-day ; but what does it matter if she likes it ?"

"A queer diversion. So you say little Rie's father was a curate. I don't think I ever heard of him. Is he dead ?"

"Oh, long ago. Rie lives with her grandparents, his father and mother, strong-minded folks, they were too much for their son and his wife,—extinguished them bodily,—snuffed them both out in fact."

"How? Pray, Aunt Judy, be more explicit, you excite my curiosity."

"Don't you remember Rie's mother, Stephen Gilpin's sister? No, of course not; she left home about the time you were born. Alice, your mother, liked her; they were a pair of simpletons. Well, she married a curate, as I said—such a creature, worse than any of Aunt Faith's followers; he'd no chin, and no forehead, nothing on earth but a nose. What the bishops are about—but there, it's no use talking about that. Well, this creature had gone into the Church without counting the cost; thought of course he could write sermons, and do all that other people did, but he couldn't—no, not for the life of him could he put two sentences together; and the old fellow, his father, kept railing at him; and the wife, silly thing, lay on her sofa wondering why no one gave him a living, and bemoaning her hard lot that she had no house of her own. Then little Rie came, a bonny, bouncing baby, never still one minute, all life and spirits; and one day, without any rhyme or reason, just because she was too idle to live, the silly mother died. How Stephen Gilpin came to have such a sister, I can't imagine."

"And the father, this helpless curate?"

"Sermons, or rather his lack of them, finished him off. If the old man had let him alone, he'd have preached other people's discourses, which is what every curate should do till he has lived long enough to have a few ideas of his own; but that wasn't old Mr. Rae's opinion. Johnnie must write his own sermons, and Johnnie couldn't."

"Well, but how did he die?"

"What did the doctors call it, do you mean? Somebody said it was brain fever, but as he hadn't any brains, that could hardly be!"

"You seem to have been unlucky in your experience of curates, Aunt Judy; they cannot all be such poor creatures."

"I don't know," Miss Wyke remarked; "there's something wrong in their bringing up, for which I'm inclined to think the bishops are to blame. They might at least insist upon their learning to read, but I never heard that they do; and they might suggest to them not always to choose the most incomprehensible verses in the Bible as the subjects for their sermons. For my part, I think they should only preach to children; but never mind them, Alan—happily we are not responsible for their failures and consequent misfortunes. I wish, when they wail over their sufferings, as they are always doing, they would take into account how much we endure at their hands."

Thereupon Miss Wyke got up, stirred the fire vehemently, routing up a large Persian cat which was reposing before the fire, and pushing various chairs into most inconvenient positions about the room, as a vent to her feelings, then she said—

"I'm better now. Get a book, Alan; we've talked scandal enough for one evening."

About a week after this conversation, much to the annoyance of the mistress of the house, a heavy cold and sore-throat kept her nephew a prisoner to the house for two or three days. She was by no means sure that it was bad enough to justify his staying at home, and equally uncertain whether it would not be decidedly risky for him to venture out during a horrid piece of snowy weather just then prevailing. So she alternately scoffed at him for his tender care of himself, and asserted that if he went out she would have nothing more to do with him. Aunt Faith bought him a dozen varieties of

cough lozenges, and wanted to dress him in mustard poultices from head to foot ; on the whole Alan preferred Miss Judith's mode of treatment. She had a fire lighted for him in her back drawing-room, that he might be out of the way and bade him stay there until she wanted him ; then she pursued her own avocations—received her visitors, wrote her letters, and managed her housekeeping in her brisk, lively fashion, making frequent inroads on her nephew to complain of the trouble of having a third sitting-room fire to keep up, and to assure him that never before had she known any Wyke degenerate enough to stay indoors for a cold.

It was about the hour usually termed "blind man's holiday," of the second day of this lively imprisonment, that Alan, half dozing between the lights, became aware that his aunts were entertaining a visitor in the other drawing-room, whose voice seemed in some strange way to recall some childish memories. He roused himself and listened.

"Oh yes, I remember Patty, dear little thing, and that queer boy, her brother—he had large, frightened eyes. I used to laugh at him, and Patty was so cross with me. Is he here now?—not in the other room, did you say?" and there was a sudden lowering of the voice ; and then Alan heard his name called by Miss Judith.

"Alan, come here. I do believe the boy is asleep."

"No, he isn't," was Alan's rejoinder, as he pushed the heavy curtain back which separated the two rooms, and stumbling over a footstool in the dim light, made his way to the group, around the fire in the front drawing-room, and was duly introduced to "Miss Rizpah Rae, whom you knew well enough long ago."

She half rose from her seat on the rug, and gave him a warm comfortable sort of hand, and in the firelight



he saw a pale but very animated face, which turned quickly this way and that to look at whoever chanced to be speaking ; he thought of his aunt's description of her as a baby, "all life and motion." She was "still little Rie," as Miss Judy had said, a plump, well-made little figure, quick in all her movements, light and active, soberly attired in a plain dark dress, and a short, simple jacket, and small felt hat.

She had been telling some news of her grandparents when Alan appeared, and soon resumed the thread of her story. Miss Judy knitted and listened, interjecting short remarks. Miss Faith was making tea, and called upon Alan to hand it. As he gave her cup to Miss Rae, she looked up at him suddenly, and said—

"So you are the doctor I met the other day in my nursing and cleaning-up rounds. Why didn't you tell me you were Miss Wyke's nephew?"

"Why should I, seeing I had no idea who you were? The child is getting all right again, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes ; it was more frightened than hurt ; and fortunately there wasn't much fire in the grate. It's a dear little soul, and so is Ben. Alack and alas ! I wish I wasn't going away from all the dirty babies and drunken mothers. I am sure I was meant to live and die among them. Miss Judith, are there any dirty brats in the north country for me to see to?"

"There are dirty brats in every country under the sun, Rie ; but you are not going yet, are you?"

"Grannie had a sort of final letter from Aunt Jane this morning. She asked for an answer at once, because she said she could not die happily unless there was some one to come to take care of Uncle Gilpin when she was gone ; and Grannie says I must go. I am

afraid Aunt Jane is very bad, for she did not write herself, but dictated the letter."

"This child is going to Langdale to live with Stephen Gilpin, Alan," explained Miss Wyke. "It seems Miss Gilpin is dying, and stipulates that Rie shall go and take care of her uncle. Rie thinks she is going into an entirely desert land."

"A vast howling wilderness it will be to me indeed," said the girl. "Uncle Stephen is almost a stranger to me ; and I can't imagine what people find to do in those out-of-the-way places."

"There are dirty brats everywhere," said Miss Wyke, grimly.

"That is one consolation ; but I fear the number is limited. I clung to the hope that Grannie would say she wanted me, but nothing of the kind. She only said, 'It's your duty to go, Rie,' and she has written to Aunt Jane already to set her mind at rest."

"Did you struggle against your fate," inquired Alan, "or submit at once?"

The young girl laughed.

"He does not know Grannie, does he, Miss Judith?"

"No ; he has no such resolute characters among his friends and relations. Rizpah, child, be thankful that you are never left in doubt about your path of duty, and so no chance is left you of swerving to the right hand or the left."

The girl looked pensive. She was sitting on a low chair beside Miss Judith ; her two soft, shapely hands were clasped on Miss Judith's knee ; her eyes—such speaking eyes—were fixed on her friend's face.

"But the quietness," she said, in a low voice. "Miss Wyke, I do not wish to grumble ; I know, of course, that it is lovely there ; but the stillness and the silence,

when I think of it, I feel frightened. I believe I shall see ghosts there."

"Not you ; eyes like yours don't see ghosts."

"What a comfort ! I hope they'll see something to do ; but I fear it can't be much, and I'm so strong, and, as they say of good servant-girls, so willing. You'll give me a good character, won't you, Miss Judith, dear ? Honest, respectable, strong, and willing. May I tell Uncle Stephen that you will answer for me so far as those qualifications go ? Oh, Mr. Wyke, what sort of a man is Uncle Stephen ?—do tell me ; you know him, of course ?"

Yes, Alan knew him ; and while he talked, those bright, deep eyes rested on him with just the same straightforward glance that Rie would have bent on her grandfather, uncle, or any other of her acquaintance. There was no coquetry about this girl, and Alan recognized at once that she was not thinking of him, but simply of what he was saying. When he ceased speaking—and he had much to say of the Vicar of Langdale—she observed with a sigh—

"Well, I've had my grumble, and feel ever so much better. Now I'd better go. May I come and see you again when the day is fixed, just to say good-bye ?"

"Of course. Are you going ? Alan is coddling a cold, or he could see you home."

"I wouldn't have him. I always take myself home. I've been brought up to take care of myself. Good-bye, Miss Faith—good-bye, good-bye," and she ran off, closely followed by Alan, protesting that he was coming with her—it was too late for her to be out alone—Patty never did such things, &c., &c. ; but she had opened the door, and was out on the steps before he had found hat or coat to follow her.

Should he persist? Suddenly the door flew open, she had not shut it as she fully intended to do, and the wind was high. Alan, struggling into his coat, thought he heard a cry—no, scarcely a cry, but something more like an exclamation of dismay or pain. The steps were slippery, Rie had fallen.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, as he helped her to her feet; "sprained your ankle, or only given yourself a horrid shake? What is it? Come back into the house for a few minutes, and let us see."

"Don't, don't," she said, as he tried to take her hand. "It hurts. I tried to save myself, and twisted it; don't touch it please."

He led her back into the house; the injured hand hung down.

"What a goose I am!" she said. "It makes me giddy; please let me sit down a minute. Don't frighten your aunt; I shall be all right directly," and with this cheerful assurance, she then and there sat down and fainted away.

"And you pretend you are going to be a doctor, and you never had the wits to lay her flat down on the floor," said Miss Wyke, when Alan precipitately summoned her to his aid. "Carry her into the dining-room and lay her flat on the sofa. Tumbled down; nonsense, I don't believe it."

"But she did, Aunt Judy; she has hurt her wrist, she said—dislocated it, I should think,—not broken, I hope."

"Broken her wrist; what an idea! I don't believe it. Her mother might have broken her arm—I dare say she did it a dozen times—but Rie has too much sense."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ON THE MOUNTAIN-SIDE.

"When sleety showers her path assail,  
And like a torrent roars the headstrong gale."  
WORDSWORTH.

LADY WYKE had been alone all the morning. Sir Andrew had gone to Carlisle for two or three days, and his wife had rather curtly declined his proposal that she should accompany him ; so he had departed alone, and she felt free, but not so glad at heart as she had fancied she should be. Patty had announced that she had a tidying fit on her, and that she intended to turn out all her drawers and cupboards and begin life afresh. Lady Wyke thought she would do the same, and accordingly spent some time looking over her various possessions, reading and tearing up old letters.

"But," said Patty gaily, "as you haven't a year's accumulation of rubbish to turn out, you will soon arrive at the conclusion that you are a respectable character, while I—it will be hours before I have a chance of recovering my self-respect—I am going to shut myself in my room, and I hope everybody will be wise enough to keep away from me."

Apparently her forebodings had been verified, for Lady Wyke had spent an hour or more in solitary musings before her step-daughter joined her at the luncheon-table. Those musings had not been cheering,

and Patty was not slow to perceive this, and to reproach herself for having left "the poor dear" so long alone.

"Can it be that she's fretting after Sir Andrew?" she asked herself. "No—impossible!" Aloud she asked—"What are you going to do this afternoon? Drive to inquire after Miss Gilpin, or stay at home?"

"We went to ask after Miss Gilpin yesterday, and I don't want to drive to-day; I feel so restless, let us have a walk. It is so mild and soft, almost like a spring day—no signs of the frost and snow Alan talks about."

Patty looked doubtful.

"Nan says it is going to rain," she said; "she feels it in her bones."

"Rain, with that sky, it is impossible. Let us put on thick boots and walk slowly up the hill. I shouldn't wonder if we get as far as the tarn."

"I am not sure that you ought to do any climbing, and I'm more than half inclined to say it *is* going to rain, but it sounds so disagreeable, that I won't."

"A little rain won't hurt us," replied Lady Wyke. "But it gets dark so soon, let's go at once."

And Patty made no further demur. How she wished afterwards that she had been more resolute; "but to make a fuss about trifles always sounds so like Sir Andrew," she thought, "that is why I let her go."

The weather had been dry and mild for weeks past; no signs of coming frost and snow had as yet made their appearance in the valley, and the slight sprinkling of snow which had once or twice whitened the mountain tops, had melted away as quickly and suddenly as it had come.

"I feel so well when I go up the hills," said Lady Wyke. "I am sure Alan is right; and to live right underneath these solemn-looking mountains is an awful

thing. Patty, I wish the Lowes could be carted up here on to the hill-side."

"So do I; but don't let Alan's grumbles infect you. He has always had superstitious feelings about these dear old hills and dales; he calls ours 'the Valley of the Shadow'; and I verily believe that sitting by our solemn silent tarn, he has seen as many evil spirits as the old dreamer did; while I see nothing dree or spirit-like, though I may be sitting by his side all the time. It's just the *way* one looks at things, Lady Wyke, that makes the difference."

"I suppose that with Alan these morbid impressions are constitutional."

"Alan can be as jolly as any one when he likes. I never let him talk such nonsense to me. Please don't encourage him, Lady Wyke."

"Who is this girl he writes about, Patty?—this girl who fell down as she was leaving your aunt's house, and hurt her arm?"

"Rizpah Rae—oh, don't you know? She is Mr. Gilpin's niece, and when Miss Gilpin dies, which will be soon, I fear, she is to come and take care of her uncle. We knew her when we were all children, but I have not seen her for ever so long; and it seems Alan did not recognize her when he first saw her. I shall be glad when she comes, there are so few girls in these parts."

"She will be dull with that old man."

"Do you think so? But perhaps she will. Alan says she leads such a busy life in London, and certainly there is nothing much to do in Langdale."

"Nor here," sighed Lady Wyke.

Patty turned her clear blue eyes on her companion with a gaze of sympathy and compassion.

"I wish you did not find it quite so dull," she said;

"because, you know, you make it ever so much more lively for me ; and when I hear you sigh, I begin to be afraid, and almost as—what shall I say ?—as superstitious as Alan ?"

"About what ?"

"About you. Oh, Lady Wyke, don't let yourself be sad. Isn't this vale just perfectly lovely?—aren't those mountains most wonderfully glorious? Look at the greenish-blue streaks in the sky, the red-brown of the faded gorse, and the purple of those dark rocks, and tell me what could be more beautiful,—and isn't the quiet and solitude most delicious? What would you have more? And then when the spring comes, and the first delicate streaks of green show on the larches down below there, and the primroses peep out among the stones and grass, and the young lambs are about the fields, and the buds burst in the hedges, I could sing all day long ; and so will you, if you just make up your mind that you won't think about the fidgets and fuss, and are determined not to be worried into your grave. Oh, how I do preach, and what a bore you must think me ! Kiss me and forgive me, there's a dear."

"You are such a strange girl, Patty, I can't believe you are only nineteen."

"No, I dare say not ; I think it must be a mistake, and some day I shall find out I am an impostor, and have grey hair and no teeth. How can we be sure how old we are ?—we have to take other people's word for it, and few people are trustworthy. I saw two horrid lines in my forehead yesterday, and had to rub them ever so long before they would disappear."

"I don't see them."

"No ; I got rid of them, but the sight of them made me seriously uneasy. I think it is so wrong of people to



allow their faces to get wrinkled and disagreeable-looking, don't you?"

"I never thought about it."

"No; you're so unworldly. Now those are just the things I do think about. I'm always tormenting Alan about the deplorable lines round his mouth. I'm ashamed of him when I see them. Nobody ought to go about making a moan; it's cowardly, isn't it?"

"What does he moan about?—he was lively enough when I met him last summer."

"Yes, and so he is half his time, and the other half is cloudy weather with Alan; but why, I never asked him. He thinks too much about small worries, which only makes them worse. Now, Lady Wyke, can anything be more delicious than the silence and peace by this tarn? People may grumble and fume and fret down below, but up here we can forget it all. You may come up here again and again and not meet a creature. Oh, I love to be all alone up here, shut in by these grand old hills, and watch the clouds scud along the sky, and slip along the sides of the hills, and roll themselves up and put themselves away. But do you know I don't like the look of the clouds this afternoon, I am sure we shall have rain. We must not stay here by the tarn any longer, we must be thinking of going home."

They stood awhile longer by the grey quiet water, then climbed to a point from which a glorious peep could be obtained. Lady Wyke seemed rather tired and inclined to linger on the way. Suddenly she exclaimed—

"Patty, I felt a drop of rain, and look what a heavy cloud that is!—we had better turn."

"Yes, indeed; but no, it is raining fast over that hill; and see how fast the clouds are sweeping over the

valley! We had better run to those rocks, and take shelter under them till the worst is over; we shall be drowned if we go down the hill-side in such rain as that."

They hastened along, and were soon crouching under some heaped-up rocks, whence in safety they could watch the vast sheet of rain driving along the mountain-side; but gradually the whole sky became overcast, every streak of light disappeared, and a leaden grey mist settled over the entire landscape. Patty grew uneasy, and in reply to her companion's "Such rain as this must soon be over," she laughed faintly, and said—"Indeed I would not answer for that,—it does rain like this sometimes for days together; but we must wait and see." And then she grew very silent, scanning the heavens with eager eyes, and from time to time creeping forth from their shelter to take a wider view of the prospect.

"The clouds seem below us," Lady Wyke observed.

"Yes, and around and above too," Patty replied, "and the rain is settling into a steady downpour. If it doesn't lessen soon, we shall have to brave it, or you will catch your death of cold under this rock."

"You are more likely to take cold. I am very strong; don't fidget about me," her step-mother replied. "I wish I had not proposed the walk."

Half-an-hour passed.

"This won't do," said Patty, shivering. "Shall we face it, and make the best of our way home? Why, you are quite cramped and stiff. I am afraid your boots are not very thick."

"It is not very far, we shall not be long," Lady Wyke replied. "Why, Patty, this is quite an adventure. I am glad your father is not at home."

"I should think you are. Oh, take care, the rocks

are slippery! What a noise the streams are making!—one can scarcely hear oneself speak.”

“The wind takes my breath away; under that wall we should be more sheltered; shall we try and get there, Patty?”

“Wait a minute. I believe the ground thereabouts is all marshy; let me go and see. Wait till I call.”

She bounded over the rocks and furze and grass, crying, “I’ll call if it’s safe”—and what happened next she never could clearly remember. There came a violent gust of wind, and all at once a dark sheet of rain seemed to wrap her round; the water filled her eyes, her ears, her mouth, it streamed from her hat, dripped from her skirts, blinded and deafened her. For a moment she sunk down on her hands and knees, and cowered before the pitiless attack of the storm. Then she turned to look behind her, but the rain-cloud and mist hid the mountain-side, the path she had left, the rushing stream below, everything from her sight; it had risen like a wall behind her. Well, she must go back at once, if only the wind would permit her. How stupid to have left the path! She picked herself up, and struggled to her feet. Then there followed a hopeless wandering up and down the hill; an equally hopeless attempt to see through the mists that covered the whole mountain-side; desperate endeavours to make her voice heard above the roar of winds and waters; her words seemed to be blown back down her throat. She knew the attempt was useless, but yet how could she give it up? Lady Wyke must surely have left the path, for certainly she was nowhere to be seen when Patty struggled back to the spot where she had left her standing not ten minutes before. But why,—why had she gone? Had she started to follow Patty, and lost sight

of her, and gone astray?—or had she started to run home without waiting for her companion?—or had she lost her footing and fallen down the hill-side? Each of these ideas seemed quite improbable, but meanwhile what was to be done? Patty stood still, and strained her ears to listen if, amidst the turmoil of rushing torrents and whirling winds, she could catch the faintest sound of a human voice. Once and again her heart beat quick and fast with hope, as the plaintive cry of some wild mountain bird scudding by on the blast sounded so human in its complaining that for a moment she felt sure that Hester was close at hand. Then silence again fell on the lone hill-side; the wind hushed for a few minutes, and the stillness was more awful than the wild uproar had been. For some minutes—ages they seemed—Patty stood still, thinking—"If she has wandered, she will come back to the spot to look for me. I cannot see a yard in front of me on either hand, so it is useless to attempt to follow her;" but before long, growing restless and too miserable to keep still, she began roaming up and down, ever and anon straining her voice to call, shrieking, screaming at the top of her voice, but no answer came. How long she lingered close to the spot where they had parted, Patty had no idea, nor did she notice how thoroughly soaked she was, though well aware that her skirts were so heavy with water that she found it hard to move. It was growing dark when she began to drag her tired limbs and aching feet along the path down the hill, telling herself that it had been folly to stay so long; Lady Wyke had no doubt gone home, and would be growing anxious about her. "She will laugh at me, and I shall laugh at myself, and we shall have such a cosy evening all by ourselves." So she comforted herself. But the way had never seemed so long, and the rain

poured down in the same pitiless fashion, streaming from her hat, running down her neck, filling her boots, and oozing out through the soaked leather. She was fairly spent, when at last she pushed the heavy hall door open, and met the astonished gaze of the old butler and of her old nurse, who were talking in anxious tones beside the fire in the great hall.

"Miss Patty—oh, my child!" said old Nan,—“we thought—but—what is it?”

"Lady Wyke? Has she come in?" gasped the girl, forgetting all else in her great fear.

"Lady Wyke!—why, wasn't she with you? Sure, Miss Patty, you went out together."

"Yes; but we missed each other on the hill—in the rain." Patty's face grew white with terror. "George, somebody must go and search all over the hills; send out every man you can find. She doesn't know the hills, and the mist is thick. I stayed till it was nearly dark, and then——"

"My child, you're wet through; come and take these things off, and get straight into bed." Old Nan grew peremptory when Patty hesitated. "Yes, yes, George will see to it; Lady Wyke is not so light of foot as you; she'll be in presently, you'll see."

But Patty would not move.

"George, be quick," she urged; "she has lost her way, I am sure of it. Let them take lanterns, and shout. I could not make myself heard. Oh, never mind me, Nan, make them go quick. I am safe, and she is not; what does it matter if I am wet? She will die if she spends the night out on the mountain-side."

"Ay, for certain; but, my lamb, it cannot be; she'll find her way home, or they'll find her. Now run up—

stairs and get those things off. Yes, yes; I'll see the men off, I will."

And so she did; but when she came up to Patty's room it was to find the girl leaning far out of the window gazing into the fast-gathering gloom at the dark mountain-top just appearing above a bank of cloud and mist; the rain was still falling, but not so heavily, and the wind had gone down to some extent.

"Oh, Nan, it is awful!" she sobbed.

But Nan and one of the maids were busy unfastening her dress, pulling off the soaked boots, and wringing the wet from her hair. There was not a dry thread in her clothes. They made no reply to her exclamation, until they were satisfied that she was dried and warmed; then the old woman said soothingly—

"Ay, ay, it is awful; but they'll not rest till they find her,—not if they stay out all night a-looking for her; they said so as they started off, and they'll keep their word."

And so they did. The long evening and longer night wore away to the searchers on the hills, through mist and cold and rain; and to the watchers in the house in the vale below; and the morning dawned at last, chilly, rainy, and dull, but it brought no tidings of the lost Lady of the Lowes; and poor Patty's bright spirit died within her as she said—

"Nan, Alan is right. Ill luck does haunt this house; we cannot escape from it; and oh, Nan, I suppose you are right, we must telegraph for Sir Andrew."

## CHAPTER IX.

### WAITING, WAITING.

"O for comfort, O the waste of a long doubt—  
and trouble.  
I was tired of my sorrow."—J. INGELOW.

AND Sir Andrew came, much shocked and disturbed, by the afternoon train. They had telegraphed for him early in the morning; but no one had calculated when he was likely to arrive, and all the men being out on the hills, no one had thought of sending the carriage to meet him. "And the coach was full, and I had to take a conveyance from the station. Most thoughtless of you, Patty; and as for George, I shall certainly discharge him."

And then he must hear the story of the strange disappearance of his wife from everybody in the house, cross-examining them on every point, and contradicting and browbeating each and all. It was absurd to say she was lost. Lady Wyke die like a beggar on the hill-side! It was monstrous; couldn't possibly be; probably she had gone down the hill without waiting for Patty, and had taken shelter somewhere from the storm. Had they inquired in the village? No, of course not; not a creature in the house had an ounce of sense. He wondered whether any dinner would be forthcoming for him? Did they imagine he had stopped for dinner on the way? Of course *he* was the last person to be con-

sidered—it was always so. What were they doing now to get to the bottom of this mystery? Running about the hills still? Most absurd! What woman in her senses would spend the night on the hills?—and Lady Wyke, with all her weaknesses, had, he was glad to say, a fair amount of common sense.

“What else could we do?” asked Patty, with compressed lips. “We haven’t the least idea where she is. She does not know the hills; and in such a mist and storm as last night’s any one might have lost her way.”

Sir Andrew smiled contemptuously.

“If ladies will wander about in all weathers,” he began; “but you are always fanciful, Patty. Are you sure Lady Wyke is not at this moment in her own room?”

Patty made no reply. She was growing almost frantic with anxiety, and the effort to keep calm in her father’s presence, listening to his exasperating talk, was beyond her powers. She desisted from all attempts to answer him, and crept up feebly to her room, half inclined to climb the hill again. She had already made two attempts that day; but old Nan, guessing her thought, followed her, determined, if possible, to frustrate any such intention. She put her arms caressingly round her, then for the first time the girl’s fortitude gave way, and she cried and cried till fairly wearied out.

“There, there, my pretty!—lie down and rest your poor head; you’ve eaten nothing to-day, and that can’t go on. Some dinner you must take, and if Sir Andrew can, why shouldn’t you? What did you say? He doesn’t care? Well, my dear, he’s used to such things. Ah, there’s Ellen coming up-stairs; she’ll fetch you some tea. No, no; you can’t go out again. All your boots are wet through, and pretty well worn out too.”

“Nan, some one must write to Alan.”



"By and by, my dear."

"To-night, Nan."

"Why, my dear, it's too late for the post. To-morrow we'll have some news to send—pray God it may be good news. And then you'll write yourself."

"What good news can there be, Nan? Oh, it *is* a luckless house!" She shuddered. "Nurse, where is she now?"

"They haven't found her, Miss Patty, so she *may* be safe and well."

"Safe and well? Then she would have come home, or sent some word."

The old woman was silent; she had been saying the same things to herself all day, and had no answer to this reasoning.

"Perhaps she is sheltering somewhere," Patty at last suggested, "and wants to see if *he* cares; but she would never torture *me* in this way. No, Nan; she is dead, I am sure of it. Didn't the men say that it was snowing towards morning, and that in some places the drifts were deep?"

"They did; but that was high up, far above where you went."

"Nan, I must know soon, or I shall die too."

"Nay, nay, dearie; thou'lt never leave the old woman alone. Turn thy thoughts to God, Miss Patty. He can keep the heart from breaking; and be sure of this—He has her in His mighty keeping."

Patty lay still with eyes closed, a few tears stealing unheeded down her pale cheeks; she was completely worn out, and old Nan hailed with relief some signs of drowsiness in her nursling.

Sir Andrew's voice below, rating the old butler, did not now seem to disturb her, and by and by the old

housekeeper ventured to creep out of the room, most carefully closing the door behind her. She was nearly as anxious as Patty, and could not rest long without news of some kind or other. She was by no means desirous of intercourse with her master, and slipping quietly behind him, made her way to the kitchen, where the last tidings from the outside world were being discussed. The two gardeners were there, and some farming men with them, all muddy and wet.

"We're certain the lady's nowhere on these fells," the gardener said; "it isn't likely as she could wander far, and we've been up and down the paths nigh here till we could tell every blade of grass, and every stone upon them. What's Sir Andrew say, Mrs. Grimes?"

"Nothing worth hearing; a wife more or less ain't much matter to him."

"Don't he take on about it?"

"He's got hold of old George, and he's giving it him, if that's what you mean by taking on. But he's been talking about his dinner, as if that was more on his mind."

"I suppose it isn't likely as the lady's keeping out of the way on purpose, seeing he's such a tormenting sort of body?" suggested one of the men in a meditative tone.

"I was thinking that same," added the undergardener; "it's altogether wonderful how the ladies have put up with him. Mrs. Pudsey, ma'am, what do you say to Joshy's notion?"

"'Tis like Joshy's impudence," broke in the cook, indignantly; "to think a lady like Lady Wyke would need to run away from her husband! When she wants to be quit of him she'll go to the Parliament House, and have the thing settled decent and respectable-like; and if she wants witnesses to prove what an old wretch

he is, she'll not need to go out of this house to find them. Well, George, what's Sir Andrew been saying to you all this while?"

"He's been going on like the old peacock; I'm a'most deaf," said the old man. "It's my fault. I had ought to have told her ladyship to bide at home, as if she'd have minded me. And it's your fault, cook; the victuals are that uneatable, she was bound to scamper over the fells a-looking for an appetite. And as for the maids, they worry her so she could never be easy indoors; and Mrs. Pudsey has always plagued the lives out of all the ladies, and we're all sent a-packing; he'll have none of us."

"I hope you asked him when he was going to start a-looking for her—saucing us can wait."

"I asked him nothing," said the old butler, "but I ask myself, why do I put up with it?"

"Ay, ay, you may well ask that,—wish he'd get himself lost."

"Doubt he'd never stop in his grave if so be we got him there," said the gardener. "There, he's ringing just as if the house were on fire."

"I'll not go," said old George. "Tom, go and see after him, will you? Fire's out in the study, I do believe."

"What's he want in the study? Isn't he going to stir a step to look for my lady?"

"Makes believe he thinks she's paying a visit somewhere, and isn't lost at all; but he doesn't really think it, not he."

"How's Miss Patty, poor dear?" inquired Mrs. Grimes of the housekeeper. "Now, Mrs. Pudsey, I'll tell you what, I've the tenderest bit of chicken you ever did see keeping warm for her. Shall I run up with it

and coax her to try to eat a mouthful? No; well I am disappointed,—going to sleep, is she? Well, that's the best thing she can do. It's a miracle she isn't laid up with rheumatic fever, or ague, or something worse after all she's been through yesterday and to-day. What did the master say to her?"

"Oh, talked as if it would be a forgetting of her place and dignity if Lady Wyke died on the hill-side—as if she owed it to him to die respectable like in that horrid big bed up-stairs. Upon my word," continued the old butler bitterly, "if she knew all we know of the lives that's ended in that old bed, she'd not find it easy to get much sleep in it,—that I'll answer for."

There was a silence after this remark. The younger servants shivered, the housekeeper's pale face looked a degree whiter still, and even the loquacious Mrs. Grimes seemed too awe-struck to have anything to say. No one could settle to any ordinary employment in the suspense and anxiety which pervaded the household. The maids wandered restlessly from window to window, and before long old Nan returned with painfully stealthy step to her young lady's room. Patty was lying with her eyes closed, and as she did not stir when her old nurse looked at her, Mrs. Pudsey hoped she was really asleep. She crossed the room on tiptoe, and looked out into the darkness. The mists had rolled themselves up and cleared away, the dark outlines of the hills could just be seen against the sky in their grand yet overpowering strength and stillness. The greater part of her life had been spent by Nancy Pudsey under the shadow of those grand old mountains. She had learned to love them, to delight in their manifold beauties of form and colour, their ever-changing hues of light and shade; but yet there had been moments in her life, and this was one of

them, when their giant strength, their cold immovability oppressed her. "They see generation after generation of us pass away, and they are still the same; we strive and toil, and fret and pine our lives away, and then we lie down at their feet and are forgotten, but they are still the same." So she thought somewhat bitterly, and then she softly drew the curtain and sat down beside the fire to watch and wait, to think and pray, for Nancy Pudsey had a habit of praying, which habit was not very common in that household. Sir Andrew deemed it superstition, and discouraged any allusion to such antiquated customs in his family. So Nancy had the monopoly of prayer in that household. Sir Andrew was in the habit of indulging in some choice witticisms on the subject of her old world notions and devotions; apparently he was not alive to the fact that she had also a monopoly of some other qualities, such as quiet courage, placid contentment, and unswerving honesty and truth.

Far on into the night the old woman sat by that fireside, scarcely allowing herself to change her attitude lest the sleeping girl should be disturbed. From time to time with practised fingers she made up the fire, dropping the coals softly into the hollow places, and anxiously watching that no falling cinder should rattle on the fender and arouse her charge.

"The waking would come all too soon," she thought, and then her mind recurred to the dark questionings and wonderings which nothing but thought for Patty could banish for even a moment. It was long since the old woman had climbed the hills, or ventured beyond the level ground around the house and village. Yet she knew the mountain ways well enough to have no difficulty in picturing to herself what the darksome wandering

there might have been. She could see plainly enough the dark cracks and crevices among the rocks, the cold brightness of the snow-drifts on the topmost heights, the gloom of the dark still pools and lakes, the rushing streams, the precipitous paths, the sudden hollows and dizzy heights; yes, she could see them all, and could picture to herself—an old woman's imagination could do as much as that—the lonely desolate form of the lost lady stretched in a last sleep at the foot of some jagged rock, or buried beneath a winding-sheet of sparkling snow; or, still more secure from discovery, lying deep beneath the silent waters of the dark-grey tarn. She could see it all, and as these awful pictures passed before her mind's eye, she asked herself, "Well, and if so, is it worse for her than the slower death of the weary, aching heart, the disappointed love, the unsatisfied and ever-longing, ever-hungry spirit?"

But old Nancy had hoped better things for the new Lady Wyke, and as she sat on still and motionless in Patty's room, and turned matters over in her mind, she was conscious of a great pain at her heart. "I had taken her in and given her my heart's best love, and I'm not satisfied,—no, I'm not. Yet, if 'tis His will, it must needs be right, it must needs be right, and I must leave it so. I've been glad enough before now to see them laid to rest; and, old as I am, I may live to know that to fall asleep alone and uncared for beneath a stormy sky, and to find a grave beneath that cold, cold snow, is not so bad an ending after all, if only the great God be there. Ay, *if* He be."

## CHAPTER X.

### STORM-BEATEN AND BEWILDERED.

"These drowsy shiverings,  
This mortal stupor which is creeping over me,  
What do they mean?"

WORDSWORTH.

AND how had this strange disaster come about? In the simplest manner possible. When Patty left her companion on the steep mountain-path to reconnoitre and seek another and more sheltered way down the hill-side, she had said, "Stay till I come back," and Lady Wyke had called after her, "I'll go back to our hole among the rocks, you'll find me there," but this response had been carried away by the sudden gust of wind, and had never reached Patty's ears. But as it chanced, Lady Wyke failed entirely to find her way back to the spot where they had spent the last hour. Whether she had not noticed which way she had turned, or whether the great rain-cloud which had hidden her from Patty's sight prevented her from seeing her way, she did not know, but she was not long before she discovered that she must have fallen upon the wrong path. For some minutes she tried to see where she was, but the only result of this attempt was to prove to her that she could see nothing whatever of Patty. A great wall of mist had suddenly risen up between them, and huge barriers of rock seemed also to intervene and to

hide them from each other. It was provoking, but of course it could not really signify, *she* could find her way back, and Patty would do the same when she found that they had missed each other.

But Hester Wyke had never before known what it was to find herself alone in a mist far up a mountain of which she knew next to nothing ; neither was she accustomed to be abroad in such a pitiless storm of rain and hail as that which had burst upon them. It stupefied and bewildered her. Again and again she thought she had found her way back to the path from which she had wandered, while in reality she was every moment leaving it further behind. Before long the path she was pursuing came to a sudden end, and she found herself close to the edge of a steep declivity—a black depth yawned beneath her feet, and she started back, and for the first time began to feel alarmed as she realized how easily, driven as she was by the wind, she might have gone over the edge of the precipice. She hastily turned, and began to pick her way more warily. The valley from whence she had come was entirely lost to view ; a great cloud lay beneath her, and shut out all familiar objects. There seemed to be only one course open to her—to wait until the cloud lifted, and she could form some idea where she was. So she crouched once more beneath some huge masses of rock, and tried to be patient and to wait.

But the courage which had not failed her while searching for her way was more sorely tried by this delay. The feeling of utter loneliness, the absence of all sounds of human life and motion, mingled with the splash and rush of waters, the howling and roaring of the winds, gradually produced sensations of dismay and alarm, which she could not reason away. If only the



rain would stop and the clouds lift ; but watch as she might, there seemed to be no edge to this wide-stretching sheet of mist and cloud, no prospect whatever of the steady downpour ceasing. And it would soon be dark. She had left her watch at home, but Lady Wyke felt certain that the light was rapidly fading, and the long winter night beginning.

It would never do to be benighted in that solitude, so once more she started on her wanderings, hope returning with the thought of renewed effort. Bravely she struggled on, at one time stumbling upon something like a path, at sight of which she grew sanguine that her difficulties were at an end, but the path came to an abrupt termination in a piece of swampy ground, into which her feet sank, and from which she was forced to beat a rapid retreat. Then it struck her that she was ascending instead of descending. That must needs be wrong, so she turned round, and for some time retraced her steps. And every moment she was growing colder and wetter, and every moment the darkness increased.

"If I am benighted here," she thought, "I must lie down and die. I cannot walk about all night, and if I do, as likely as not I shall walk into a tarn," but still she plodded on.

The darkness settled down on all around her, and still the rain poured down. Should she lie down and die? No, Hester Wyke still kept moving on. By degrees she ceased to hope, and almost ceased to think ; she was so beaten by the wind and rain that her senses seemed numbed. The water streamed from her hat and ran down her face ; her dress was torn by the sharp edges of rocks, and hung in tatters round her feet, her boots were nearly worn to pieces. But still she

struggled on, one thought alone in her mind, "If I sit down, I shall die."

How long she had walked she had no idea. It might be hours—it *seemed* to be days since she had parted with Patty, since they had had their pleasant talk as they came up the hill. Should she never see Patty again? In a dull patient sort of way, Hester pitied herself. Life had been such a failure of late, and yet she did not wish to die just yet; but she was too tired, too worn out, to care much what happened—still she struggled on. Once her foot struck against a rocky point sharp as a knife, and the pain roused her a little, but it did not seem to matter much. More than once she fell, bruising herself and scratching her face, but she recovered her footing again and went on, placing her feet more cautiously, and saying to herself in a dull sleepy way, "I must go on walking, if I sit down I shall die. Yes, I must keep on walking."

It was becoming every instant more difficult to keep her eyes open. The lids were growing heavy, her head was drooping on her breast, her feet almost refused to move, when she became dimly conscious of a faint light shining before her on the hill-side. The sky seemed a little lighter too—perhaps she was passing out of the cloud. She tried to rouse herself, to think, to care, at least to press on; for the light, faint as it was, seemed to beckon her. It spoke of life, perhaps of help and shelter, and though she knew not what it was, with all her remaining strength she struggled on. The light grew brighter and larger. Suddenly something dark rose up before her—a mass of rock it seemed. No; it was a stone wall, the low wall of a cottage, and the light came from the tiny window. Stumbling on, she groped along the wall to find the door—there seemed to be no

such thing, it must be round the other side. This last difficulty seemed just more than she could bear. She tried to reach the window to tap at it, when her feet went away from under her, and she fell half fainting against the wall.

Some minutes she lay thus, scarcely conscious, when she was roused by a low growl, and then a warm breath upon her face, followed immediately by two sharp barks, and a warm rough tongue on her cheek. She tried to get up, and in the faint light which now came from a half-opened door, she spied the figure of a bent old man leaning on a stick. He was calling the dog, and the dog was answering. She tried to speak, to ask for help, but no voice would come. Then the old man turned round, turned back into the house, and she heard him speaking to some one within. Was he going to shut the door? The thought gave her strength; perhaps he had not seen her. She must ask for shelter, beg to be taken in, dried and warmed. She tried to rise, but again that deadly faintness came over her.

What was it now? Some warm arms round her—feeble perhaps, but strong enough to support her trembling steps, to keep her from falling again, and the next minute she was out of the pitiless wind, the drenching rain, the horrid darkness, the terrible loneliness, in a tiny room indeed, but warm and safe. Was it the sudden warmth, or the sudden sense of relief, the change from the bitter cold without, or the overpowering rush of feelings, that made Hester Wyke sink down on the rough floor with closed eyes and so little sign of life that the old shepherd and his wife were at first convinced that she was dead? They drew her near the fire and chafed her hands, drawing off the saturated gloves and ragged boots, pitying much and wondering

much. They were so old and feeble that they could not do much but wait and watch till consciousness returned, and then she must get off her drenched clothes, and get into the bed; and so pleasant was the suggestion, that her numbed faculties failed to comprehend that it was their bed, and that, if she had it, the old couple would need to content themselves with what rest they could get in their arm-chairs.

In a dazed way she let the old woman pull off her soaked garments—there was scarcely a dry thread in them. Scarcely knowing or caring, she saw the water dripping from them lie in pools about the clean floor, and very faintly she thanked her when she laid her head on the old woman's pillow, safe and warm at last. In fact, she was fast drifting into a land of dreams and strange imaginings, and but dimly conscious of anything that went on around her. At first she slept, a heavy sleep of sheer fatigue; but before long, restless moanings and tossings took the place of calm repose, and the old couple dozing by the fire shook their heads, and made many anxious journeys into the inner room to look at her.

After a while, as the morning began to dawn, and the invalid grew somewhat quieter, they began to discuss in low tones what was to be done, and who the stranger might be. The old woman was inclined to think she was a decent servant-maid going home for a holiday.

"Mappen she hed a good pleâce," said old Aggy.

"When mooarnin' cum, we'll hev ta dew summat," replied her husband, "foak mun been leeakin' aboot fer her."

"A rakkan ya'll hev ta gaa oot an' leak aboot ower ta fell. Mebbe Jimmy Dent 'll be coomin' by, an' he mun a heeard tell if ivver a body hev git loast in t' storm."

"A's thinkin' as theear's a lile bit o' snaw on t' fells, an' fooak 'll be fer bidin' in t' hoose."

"Then we'll hev to keep her ; a'll net hev ya gang oot in t' snaw, Isaac, a tell ya."

And then they dozed again till the faint light of the morning crept in through the tiny windows, and the two old people stirred their stiff limbs, and set about getting breakfast.

As the day wore on the hearts of the poor old couple grew heavy with an unwonted anxiety, for the stranger showed little signs of reviving. She lay and slept ; now the heavy sleep of dire exhaustion, now the restless fitful sleep of fever. The exposure to wind and rain, and maybe the terror and fatigue, had wrought more mischief than the kindly hearts of her friends had at first suspected.

The old shepherd shook his head, fearing she must be but a weakly body if she could not stand a wetting once in a way ; but his wife reminded him that they had no idea how long she had been afoot, nor how far she had travelled.

"Whya dussent tha ax her whaar she coom fra, an' what she wes dewen oot in sich a storm?" inquired Isaac, after some hours had passed, and they had done nothing to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"A tell ya she's daft—we mun let her be."

And so they did. Old Aggy had a notion that it was inhospitable to ask a stranger, who had come to die at her house, what her name and business were. What would it matter? she thought ; God would know, and the poor thing had pretty well done with this world.

But Isaac was uneasy.

"Fooaks is sartan ta cum axin'," he said, and Aggy, convinced against her will, undertook to try again, and this time with better success.

The poor stranger rubbed her forehead with her hand. Perhaps the old woman's speech puzzled her, perhaps she was still light-headed. She murmured that her name was Caudale—Hester Caudale—and old Aggy triumphantly reported this intelligence to her husband.

"Theear's Caudales ower in Keeantmeer," she said ; "mebbe she's cum frae thae parts ; an' she tak her tea, an' noo we'll dew ta seeam. Mappen she'll net dee yet awhile."

So they had their tea, and then the old man got out an old book—his one book, I may say—and read, now aloud, now silently, all the long winter evening, his old wife sitting on the other side of the fire, and the old dog at his feet ; while outside the snow was falling silently, making all communication with their far-away neighbours next to impossible.

But they were patient souls, and well used to this state of things. It couldn't be helped, they said ; the poor body's friends must be fretting about her. Well, they must just bear it—sure they would guess that somebody had taken her in.

"Theear's many things we mun leave an' net fratch oorsells, Jerry," Isaac often remarked to his dog, who was apt to be uneasy when sheep were away on the fells, and no tidings to be had of them. "We'er sartanly net es young es we weer, an' ta Lord He knaas et es weel es we, an' a hooap es He hes an eye ta thae sheep, soa hod ta noise, an' dooan't gaa snarlin' aboot like meead."

## CHAPTER XI.

### A YOUNG MAID'S DREAM.

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever ;  
Do noble things, not dream them all day long,  
And so make life, death, and that vast for ever,  
One grand sweet song."—KINGSLEY.

WHEN Rizpah Rae was so unthinking, or, as some folks would have it, so designing, as to fall down and dislocate her wrist on Miss Wyke's doorstep, the two kind spinsters would not hear of her going home that night. The surgeon who had been fetched was of opinion that, when he had set it to rights, she could, if imperatively necessary, go home in a cab, and Rie was sure it was imperatively necessary ; but Miss Judith said, "Stuff—girls always fancied they were indispensably necessary to their friends and relatives ; but as far as she could make out, this was a pure delusion, and friends and relatives too, for the most part, were glad enough to be rid of them"—and she should send old Mrs. Rae a telegram at once to tell her not to expect her granddaughter for a day or two.

"Grandmother will think I'm making such a fuss," urged the girl. "Do let me go, Miss Wyke."

"Shan't do anything of the kind. I've been wanting an excuse to have a fire in the spare bedroom next to mine for ever so long. Ring the bell, Alan ; and if you, Rie, don't look a little more lively, I shall send you to bed at once."

"She'd better have her boots off, and put on a pair of slippers, and lie down on the sofa until her room is ready," said sympathetic Miss Faith, kissing the pale face which wore an expression half piteous, half amused; "and Alan shall read to us, something light and amusing, just to keep you from worrying over the pain in your arm. I am afraid that Mr. Cutthroat was rather rough, my dear. Judith will have him, I don't know why. What! isn't that his name? I am sure I've always called him so."

"Very likely; and I always tell you his name is Cutbush; but it doesn't matter."

"No, indeed; but, Judith, is this the telegram? Why, you've actually told Mrs. Rae the whole truth about Rie. Hadn't you better put it more gently?"

"Spend two shillings for the sake of telling lies; no, indeed."

"Judith, you put things so coarsely. Did I ever ask you to tell a lie? But you should consider Mrs. Rae's feelings."

But Miss Wyke was already giving her message to the servant, and Miss Faith, having uttered her protest, turned to the more congenial task of making the patient comfortable, and was consoled by Rie's saying—

"Grannie won't be at all upset, Miss Faith, but she will be vexed at my giving you all this trouble."

"Don't say that to Judith; nothing makes her so angry as talk about giving trouble. We're so pleased to have you, and you'll be company for Alan, and he'll be interested in all your symptoms, you know."

"Oh, I hope not." Rie looked at Alan, such mirth in her dark-grey eyes; then they both laughed, and Miss Faith begged them not to do so, Rie would shake her poor arm and make it bad.



"And I am sure Alan will tell you that you must not excite yourself, or you will be feverish and not sleep."

Alan was quite sure that no such idea had entered his head. He assured Miss Faith that his thoughts had not yet begun to run on symptoms, and precautions, and forebodings, and he hoped they never would.

"Oh, but they must if you really care for your profession. Mr. O'Flaherty always says——"

"He's down-stairs, Aunt Faith, I heard his knock this moment," Alan interposed, and the good lady, moving ever so lightly because of the invalid, glided from the room.

There was a silence when she had gone. Rie was laughing quietly to herself, and Alan was looking straight into the fire with the melancholy smile about which Patty always tormented him. The two thus left alone were not sufficiently at ease with each other to laugh at the poor lady's foibles, but each guessed the other's thoughts. On his side, Alan felt rather shy of this girl, with her bright, clever face, and animated, eager ways. It was plain to him that, young as she was, she had already seen much of life's sternest battle-fields; had made up her mind to do her part in the world; in fact had already done some good days' work, and was panting for more.

And she? Well, to tell the truth, it is not easy to describe Rizpah Rae. Miss Judith Wyke, who was a tolerably keen observer, was wont to say that the baby Rie had laid to heart the mistakes of her parents—she had often caught her watching them with large wondering eyes, when little more than a babe in arms, and that the vehement, spirited little woman was the product of these childish reflections. It was a fanciful notion of Miss Wyke's, but she always declared that in no other

way could the mental and spiritual history of her young favourite be explained.

One characteristic of this young maiden was, that she never seemed to be thinking about herself, or wondering in the least what others thought of her. The truth was, she had so many other subjects for thought that self had long ago retired to the background ; therefore if she was thinking about her companion at all as he sat gazing into the fire, and she rested comfortably on the sofa, the idea of wondering what impression she had made on him, which would have been uppermost in many a girl's mind, never once occurred to her.

They were silent. Alan supposing that the pain she was suffering would make her disinclined for conversation ; and Rizpah thinking regretfully of the many little duties which were calling for her at home. Before long Miss Judith bustled back, saying it was dinner-time, but Rie must stay where she was and eat her food there.

"This one," she said, with a nod at Alan, "must of course have a late dinner, or I should prefer your grandmother's more sensible practice of getting rid of the smell of cooking as early as possible in the day."

"Aunt Judith always has dined late as long as I can remember," Alan observed, "and I wouldn't interfere with her arrangements for the world. And the curates like it too."

"I'll stop it at once," was Miss Wyke's vehement protest, but no one believed her.

The next day was Sunday. Alan's cold was better, and he announced his intention of going out.

"Of course," said Miss Judith, "nobody gets rid of a cold so long as he sits over the fire, and you had better go and see this child's people, and tell them there's

nothing the matter with her. Take a message from me."

"What shall I say? You must make me understand where they live."

"Say what I told you; there's nothing the matter, but she's going to stay here a few days. The grandmother will say she's to come home,—thinks I spoil her. *I*, indeed, never spoiled any one in my life,—couldn't do it. Just say she's not coming. Susannah Rae understands me. You'd better go in time for church. John Rae puts things in a sensible way, and his poor people listen to him. I've seen faces in that church that I can never forget; faces lined and wrinkled, with eyes that have wept till they can weep no more; faces that look as if they had never smiled since they came into the world; hope has died out of them; life has nearly become extinct; but they gaze at that old parson when he tells of the life to come, and you'll see they go away comforted; and you may perhaps think it worth while to ask whether this hope of theirs will be disappointed, or whether the life they have lived is to be the whole of their portion, whatever you may think about yourself. Alan Wyke, I think you'll not refuse those poor creatures a life to come. There, get along, and don't go to sleep in church."

And Alan took her advice,—people generally did take Miss Wyke's advice: I think it is very possible that he carried out her directions to the letter, even to the train of thought he was to pursue while listening to the plain, matter-of-fact discourse of the rugged-browed old parson to his poverty-stricken flock. For Miss Judith was right—he could see just such faces as she had described; ay, and others which she had not described, in which Alan thought he could read a tale of doubt or unbelief mingled with the hard lines which told of racking care

and anxiety; and he watched with absorbing interest as these expressions changed or softened down, as the dull-looking eye lighted up, and the weary lines were smoothed on many a brow as the old divine told of the Crown of Thorns, the Visage that was so marred more than any man, and of the tears in Gethsemane, and the exceeding bitter agony of Calvary.

"He at least means what he says, and they know it," thought Alan, as on leaving the old church he turned his steps towards the house pointed out to him as the Vicarage, there to make himself known to Rae's grandparents, and deliver Miss Wyke's message. It was a dark, grim-looking building, and its rooms had none of the dainty little decorations to which Patty had accustomed him, or the more solid comforts which rendered his aunt's house such a home-like abode. There was not a curtain or a chair which had not its use in this sombre dwelling of the old city parson; and yet he was old enough, as Alan reflected, to lay claim to easy-chairs and a few other creature comforts. Scant means and stern self-denial was the story told by the furniture and general aspect of that abode. The old parson's coat—and of course it was his Sunday best—told the same tale, and the lunch to which Alan found himself invited was certainly the plainest fare to which he had ever sat down.

"We're working people," the old man had said, "and hunger is the best sauce; if you'll stay, we'll sit down and eat like Christians; for the most part my wife and I snatch our meals standing; but this is Sunday, and my good friend Lewis is going to dine with us."

Yes, Alan would stay; and sitting at that table listening to the talk that went forward there between the stern-looking but most tender-hearted old parson,

and his sensible-looking curate, so different from Aunt Faith's followers, he told himself that it had never before entered his heart to feel ashamed, as he then did, to have a decent coat on his back. The well-worn garments of John Rae and his wife, the absence of all luxury or indulgence in food or house, were a fitting commentary on the sermon he had heard. "Even Fanshaw could not call these people humbugs," he thought; "how they revel in their work!" And then he wondered whether Miss Wyke, in her sweeping denunciation of curates, had ever taken count of the young fellow who sat opposite to him, and whose modest bearing, and evidently enthusiastic respect for his Vicar, made a most favourable impression on Alan's mind. He would take her to task for uncharitableness without loss of time; it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Leaving the Vicarage, Alan remembered an engagement which had almost escaped his memory, to look in upon his old acquaintance, Captain Fanshaw, who was then in town, and had sent him word to that effect.

They had not met since that unfortunate cruise in the *Jackal*, the remembrance of which always made Alan shudder; to see Fanshaw would bring it all back, nevertheless he had promised the Captain to look him up, and so he went.

As usual, his friend was in the most comfortable quarters that could be had, surrounded with all the luxuries of fashionable life. Alan had never cared for such things, and just at that moment he felt peculiarly out of tune with Fanshaw's indolent and languid manner, the fastidious refinement of all his surroundings, and the turn which his conversation was wont to take.

Did Fanshaw discover it? They had never, even in their school-boy days, been perfectly at ease with each

other, but they seemed to have drifted further apart since last they met. As by common consent that last meeting was ignored ; but after a while Alan asked for Fitzacre.

"What has he been doing lately—you and he were in Paris for some time?" he asked, but felt no great interest in the answer. Charles Fitzacre was not interesting to many of his acquaintances ; but there had been an awkward pause in the conversation, and the inquiry served to fill it up.

"Yes," Fanshaw replied, "we stayed till we were tired of it, and joined the yacht at Ostend. Fitzacre is with his mother now—horrible old woman!—but he can't help it,—he is in an awfully bad way, and she gives him house-room."

"Debt?" inquired Alan.

"Oh, debts,—I should just think so. But I didn't mean that. A man told me last week that he's going to the bad altogether,—breaking up fast,—got some hideous complaint that can't be cured,—suffers awfully, and can't live many weeks. He's lived too fast, you know. Good sort of fellow,—not a bit of harm in poor Charles, but he has no constitution, and, well . . . he *has* been fast, and no mistake. But it's hard lines, I must say."

"How old is he?"

"Six-and-twenty, or thereabouts. Awfully hard, isn't it?"

Alan was silent. Captain Fanshaw puffed away at his cigar, and not heeding his silence, went on—

"They don't tell him it's hopeless, of course, so if you come across him, keep your own counsel."

"He thinks he'll get well?"

"Of course, or pretends he does; and the doctors

encourage him. Why shouldn't they? You're setting up for a doctor, aren't you, Wyke? Well, remember this. No one will pay you to tell them they're going to die. If you go in for telling the whole truth, your practice won't find you bread-and-butter."

"Are we all such cowards?"

Captain Fanshaw laughed, but there was a bitter sound and no mirth in his laughter, as he replied—

"Call it cowardly if you like; but I tell you, and you know it, that there isn't a man, woman, or child that likes to be told that he has one foot in the grave; and if you mean to succeed in your profession, you'll do as the rest of them do, and go about pretending you never have anything to do with such horrors."

"But you don't answer my question. Why are we, the world in general, so scared at the thought of the inevitable end? If it's a sleep, there's nothing so very frightful in sleep."

"Who knows that it's a sleep? It's the end, whatever that may mean. Are you taking up the notion that there's something beyond Death, like that poor lad we lost off the *Jackal*? I thought you'd more sense."

"It made him uncommonly jolly," was Alan's answer.

The Captain made no reply, and Alan, returning to the subject of Fitzacre's illness, asked a few more questions about symptoms, and the probable length of life left to him; and when Fanshaw said—"Go and see him, and judge for yourself," he was half inclined to do so. "If," as he remarked, "the man wasn't such a bear."

When he reached home that evening, Miss Wyke was eager to know how he had sped on his errand, and Rie shyly anxious to find out what he thought of her grandparents.

"Didn't Grannie say I was to come home at once, Mr. Wyke?" she asked.

"Why, no. Aunt Judith had said she was going to keep you for a few days, and Mrs. Rae only asked how long, which of course I could not undertake to say, but surmised it would be as long as you would stay."

"I shall keep her as long as I think fit," Miss Wyke replied. "Did you hear John Rae preach, Alan?"

"Yes, I did; he might have been an old Covenanter. Was it he who gave you your name, Miss Rae?"

"No; it was grandmother,—wasn't it, Miss Judith?"

"Yes; Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah is your namesake. Alan never heard of her, of course."

"For once you are wrong, Aunt Judy. Her two sons were hanged, and she sat beneath the gallows night and day to scare the vultures from the bodies. The story has a grim fascination for me, and I suppose Mrs. Rae shares my feeling."

"Grannie used to tell it me when I was a tiny child, and I used to think of it at night. I verily believe that is why my hair is so determinately bent on standing up on end," Rie added, laughing, and putting her hair into more sober form on her forehead.

"And is Rizpah the daughter of Aiah to be your guiding star through life?" Alan inquired.

"That she is. I am to have no such thing as idle fears. I am to bear to see my darling visions fade and die. Two have faded already, haven't they, Miss Wyke?"

"Nonsense, child, don't give fine names to your fancies; everybody builds castles in the air a few times in their lives; it makes a pleasing variety to see them tumble down, and have room to construct others. Yours were,—let me see,—first you were to be an hospital



nurse, weren't you? I know you were training in some filthy den for a year, and then you were going to India to nurse black ladies. Very nice for you, I dare say; but John Rae upset that castle in the air, didn't he?"

"Somebody was spiteful enough to tell grandfather that I oughtn't to begin real nursing till I was five-and-twenty, and so he decided I was to wait five years. And then I made up my mind to have a *crèche*, and nurse all the parish babies while their mothers are out at work, and it's quite delightful. I love babies; I've one or two not a month old; and now that castle tumbles down, and I'm to go to the north and house-keep for Uncle Stephen. But I'm not going to grumble, Miss Wyke, so don't begin to scold."

"There's a grumble in your voice, Rie."

"Is there? Then I'll shut my lips and not speak another word. Won't somebody read or sing, or do something interesting, to stop my ill-tempered tongue?"

"Alan, go and play; you can't sing, I suppose, with that croak in your voice?"

"Please excuse my curiosity, but I feel much puzzled to know why Miss Rae so fervently desired to go and nurse Hindoo ladies. I don't understand the attraction."

"Probably not. You don't understand enthusiasm, and Rie is an enthusiastic little being; and having heard of the pitiable state of Hindoo women all her life, has longed to help them."

"Oh, Miss Judith," said Rizpah, colouring, "it isn't enthusiasm. I only thought that there are so many girls in England to do the work there, and I have no parents or any special reason why I should stay in England, and should never be missed, and I had thought about it so long, that is why I am disappointed."

"You don't care so much for work in England ; you seem to find plenty ?"

"Alan, go and play, and don't worry the child with questions," his aunt commanded ; and Alan complied, and played on till Miss Faith came in from church, and with her, her special curate, Mr. O'Flaherty.

"This has been a standing dish as long as I can remember," said Alan to Rizpah as he left the piano at their entrance. "Sunday evening brings the curate as sure as April brings the cuckoo,—*the* curate you know ; happily it is not always the same."

"Alan," said Miss Judith severely, when they were alone together, the curate having bestowed his company on them for a couple of hours and then departed, Rizpah having also retired for the night, Miss Faith accompanying her—"Alan, what a Goth you are !"

"So I always imagined, Aunt Judy ; but what's the matter now ?"

"Why can't you talk to that man when he comes pestering here in the evening ?"

"I thought he came to see Aunt Faith."

"Nonsense ; he sees her half-a-dozen times a day."

"Well, at any rate he doesn't come to see me."

"What has that to do with it ? You are lazy, but it is your bounden duty to talk to any man who is a visitor of mine, and to make yourself agreeable to him."

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Talk about church millinery ?" he said.

"Talk of whatever you like. They have all their cranks. This one is fond of finery. The last was another make of man, suffered from bilious attacks and indigestion, and we were duly informed every Sunday how many pills and black draughts he had consumed during the week. Faith was worn to a thread-

paper by her anxieties after his health. Another had a mania for dogs, and brought two wretched quarrelsome beasts here whenever he came; they spent their time chasing the cat about, and tearing the curtains and upsetting the chairs. Another was musical, and bent on improving himself as a performer on the violoncello and cornet, and as his landlady would not allow him to practise at his lodgings, he brought his instruments here, and Faith thought them lovely."

"Poor Aunt Judy!"

"Queer kind of pets aren't they, Alan? But you must talk to this one all the same."

"But, Aunt Judy, my ignorance of the subject of copes and frontals, stoles and incense, is profound."

"It's intolerably conceited of you to sit there in perfect silence, as if you were above talking to my guests."

"Be more charitable, Aunt Judy. I am so oppressed with the consciousness of my ignorance, that I scarcely dare to raise my eyes, much less to speak."

"There is no conceit like that of pretended ignorance."

"Pretended! Well, Aunt Judy, there's a way out of most difficulties, and to please you, I would talk on any subject; so I'll take an hour at the British Museum, and next time O'Flaherty comes, I shall be so deeply read in church millinery that you will for once have reason to be proud of your nephew, and Aunt Faith will begin to have some hopes of me."

## CHAPTER XII.

### GUESSES.

"These questionings of thine, I know them all,  
Know too they come but as the signs of life."—PLUMPTRE.

IT had been a busy day at Guy's, and Alan had stayed late—his friend there, who was one of the house surgeons, finding him useful and handy. There had been a thick black fog over the city all the afternoon, and several accident cases had been the consequence. Alan had watched the surgeon's efforts to save life, to mitigate agony, to bring back hope to the hopeless, with the keenest interest ; he had also stood by and seen with the deepest emotion the passing away of a brave young soul from a frame as stalwart as his own ; he had heard dying words ; he had caught a glimpse of the Face of Death, as it passed him by, and laid its hand on its victim ; and when he had started off home at last, it was with the feeling, which had been growing upon him of late, that the world beyond might prove to be the great reality, while this was the unreal and the transient. His friend, the house surgeon, had stopped him as he left, and putting a packet in his hand, had asked him if he would just leave this at such a number of such a street on his way home.

"I promised it last night ; the man's very ill, you might see him, Wyke, if you can spare time."

Alan promised, and started.

Remembering suddenly that his aunt's dinner would be over, and that he was or ought to be hungry, Alan turned into the first restaurant he found, and ordered some dinner ; but while he waited for it to be brought, his thoughts flew back to the scenes he had witnessed—the questionings those scenes had suggested ; and when the meal was placed before him, he discovered that his appetite was gone and that he could not swallow it.

The waiter asked if he was ill, suggested various remedies,—wine, strong coffee,—and to this last Alan inclining, coffee was brought ; and warmed and revived, the young man turned out again into the damp thick atmosphere of the streets. The lights were dim, and the omnibuses and cabs were proceeding slowly through the thick gloom, while the foot passengers were few. It was not a night to linger, but Alan did not feel in any hurry to meet his aunts. He would certainly go and see this sick man who had been commended to him. What was his name ? Falconer—so the parcel was addressed—“D. Falconer, Esq.” A gentleman then ; from the rest of the address Alan had supposed that such was not the case. It was easy enough to find the house, a six or eight-roomed house let out in lodgings, dreary and dirty. The man must be poor as well as ill, was Alan's observation as he followed a slatternly girl up a narrow staircase to a room on the second floor.

Ill and poor D. Falconer undoubtedly was ; more than this Alan fancied he could read in the worn face with the large lustrous eyes which were turned to meet him as he came in. Poverty is the natural inheritance of some, but this man had surely known better days ; his voice, accent, and whole bearing told of cultivation and refinement, while in the patient lines round his

mouth, there seemed to lurk a tale of disappointment, bravely and resolutely borne, of suffering endured and conquered, of meek acceptance of a higher will. Around him were scattered books, papers, and writing materials ; a small reading-lamp gave a faint light to the room into which the outside fog had made its way, adding to the darkness of the evening.

Alan explained his errand, apologized for intruding ; but the smile which lit up the whole countenance of the sick man was more eloquent than words to tell how welcome was the visit.

"It is always so," Falconer remarked ; "whenever I'm tired to death of my own company, some one is sure to drop in and bring a whiff of outside things which gives me something to think about." And as if intent on securing this precious draught of other people's interests, he drew Alan on to tell of his life at Guy's, the many events of the day, and in half-an-hour they were talking as if they had known each other for years instead of minutes. And when Alan, reflecting that the man was ill, and he was in reality though not in feeling a stranger, rose to go, Falconer said so regretfully, "Going, really ; you couldn't spare another half-an-hour, I suppose," that Alan gladly sat down again.

"Yes, to be sure ; I'm at a loose end this evening, and very glad to be here."

Then by degrees the other told *his* tale,—a sad one ; but it was told with no complaint, with no apparent consciousness that it would excite pity.

He was entirely alone in the world, the sole survivor of a large family—a sister, who had lived with him for several years, having died and left him quite alone. His life had, he supposed, been something of a failure. "I probably made some mistake somewhere, but I don't

know when. I was ambitious enough once, I believe I am still, and I'm desperately fond of my work. I'm a scribbler, in a very small way now; a newspaper hack, and very glad to do their jobs for them. But once I had visions of successful authorship. People said I had talents, and the reviewers were not unkind, but the public would have none of me, and I could not afford to persevere, so I took to journalizing in a small way, and earn myself bread-and-butter; and my visions of success,—well, they will come true some day."

And he spoke with such a light in his eye, such a glow on his thin cheek, that Alan longed to hear more. "Does he really flatter himself he will get well?" he thought. But no; his next sentence answered that question.

"Death sets many things right,—but enough of me and my blunders. So you are going to be a doctor. I'm afraid you'll take the tragic side of your profession too much to heart to have an easy life of it. What made you take it up?"

Alan told him, wondering at himself as he did so, why he should confess all his weaknesses to this perfect stranger; but Falconer seemed to think it quite natural.

"Haunted by a fear of death,—want to come to closer quarters with it? Well, but tell me, is it the *act* of death you are talking about? The moment of separation of soul and body?"

"No, no; death as the end of life, extinction, annihilation, that fills me with horror. I want a glimpse beyond, but how to get it is the question."

"Can't be done, Wyke, by the light of nature. Even if you watch men die all day long, you will not see anything which will throw any light on the other side of

death ; though you may see that which will make you leave off calling it annihilation."

"You don't like the word?"

"No, indeed."

The tone was earnest, almost vehement, and Alan's heart smote him.

"This is not lively talk for you," he said. "How came we on this subject?—I hardly know."

"No matter. Do you suppose it does not interest me as much, perhaps more, than you? Looking at us two, Wyke, few people would hesitate to say which of us is likely to make the earliest acquaintance with the dread thing, and consequently which should feel the keenest interest in it. Go on ; let's see,—what did you say? Is Death annihilation? I say no! 'Tis life,—more life, I want."

"And who doesn't?" said Alan, sadly. "When I think about it, and of the chances that as soon as ever I get interested in any special work or study, death may come and put an end to it, I ask myself, Is it worth while to begin anything in life? The thought is paralyzing, and takes all the go out of me."

"You would live for ever?"

"Of course ; wouldn't every one if he had the chance?"

"So I think. Perhaps there may be some races—I don't know, but there may be some—who have sunk so low that they care nothing about the future, and know nothing of this almost universal thirst for life, or Immortality ; but all the higher spirits have declared that they cannot and will not die. Well, if we are so constituted, do you really think the desire is there only to be disappointed?"

Alan did not answer.

"You have heard so much about me to-night that you



wish I had never been born," said Falconer, smiling ; "but if you'll forgive my dragging myself to the front again, just let me ask what you think about my life? If I am shortly to be annihilated, this little taste of life that I have had,—I am not thirty, Wyke,—would scarce have been a boon to me. I have done next to nothing here ; seen plan after plan fail ; many on which I had set my heart,—too much, no doubt. I am the last of nine brothers and sisters. An ambitious set we were ; full of high dreams of working for mankind, and some of us seemed on the point of realizing our hopes, when death came in the way,—well, who knows why? They and I too wanted something ; more light, more knowledge, fuller life ; and why should I not say it, more Love. And so,—well, one by one they passed from sight, and I sit here in the evenings, feeling after hands that can be clasped no longer ; listening, till my head aches, for the old sweet voices ; seeing, whenever I close my eyes, the faces of first one and then another, as I saw them when I covered them up for the last time ; but, sad as it all sounds, sad as it is to me,—they are not dead, Wyke,—no, no. They do not die, nor lose their mortal sympathy, nor change to us. They live still, and I doubt not are going on with perfection."

Alan was silent, telling himself that he was a brute to say or even imply anything which might disturb the confidence of this dying man, but at last he spoke—

"You said the thirst for Immortality is universal?"

"Isn't it? Do you know any exceptions?"

"Well, sometimes it seems to me I do."

"I know ; the men who *profess* to be *blasé* of everything. Don't trouble about them ; their professions mean nothing. The great and good of ancient days, what say they? Socrates, Plato, Seneca, Cicero, the

Ancient Egyptians, who speak of their departed as 'the loving ones,' and pray at their feasts, 'May the departed advance upon the blissful paths that lead to the great God!'—no thought of annihilation there, Wyke."

"But you have more than this to go upon, Falconer, or you might hope ; you would scarce be sure."

The sick man smiled.

"To be sure," he said ; "but you are going, I see. Well, you will come again, and we will go on where we have stopped."

Out into the night, the gloomy night of mist and fog, Alan passed, and discovered suddenly that he was very tired. As his friend had said, he was taking his profession and its tragic side much to heart ; the agitation caused by the sights he had seen in the accident ward had taken hold of him, and he now began to realize that he had acted foolishly in going so long without food.

"I shall have to humble myself to Aunt Judy, and own that I have been an idiot, and ask for some supper," he said to himself, as he stood on the step waiting for the door to be opened. Miss Faith had a notion that all young men went to the bad who were trusted with latch-keys, and Miss Judith added that it might be a dangerous precedent, for if such things were once allowed in the household, the curates might get hold of them. "It is a satisfaction to know that they are sometimes on the other side of the front door," she quietly remarked.

Rizpah Rae had departed that afternoon. "The old fellow came and fetched her," Miss Wyke remarked. "Such a coat he had on, and such a hat ! I wonder what second-hand shop he picked them up in ; but he's true and honest, is John Rae. Aunt Faith's dancing monkey was here, and the old man could not bear his

antics, and he seized hold of the child and off he stalked ; wouldn't stay in the room with the creature for two minutes. What have you been doing with yourself all day ? ”

Alan told her. She listened silently, and he knew that she was moved by the story of the death he had witnessed. “ Such a strong fellow he seemed,—a railway porter, I believe ; his wife came in about five minutes before the end. It was awful,” he added, and she responded, “ Ay,” and bent her head over her work, and when he stopped, she said, “ Go on,” until there was no more to tell. Then he mentioned his visit to Falconer, described the man—told all he knew of him, the hard struggle he had had, his many disappointments, his cheerful courage, and then broke out into expressions of wonder.

“ Why ? ” she asked suddenly.

“ It *is* a mystery,” he repeated. “ So full of gifts, so full of purpose, why should he have failed in everything ? —and why should his life be cut so short, when men who take no real pleasure in life, do nothing but harm in it, go living on ? There seems something wrong somewhere.”

“ Does he complain ? ”

“ Not a bit—says he shall succeed yet.”

“ When ? ”

“ Not in this life, Aunt Judy ; the fellow is dying, and he knows it.”

“ That is well,” she said quietly.

“ What is well ? That his life, a good and honest one, I'm positive, should have been wasted, been a failure ? It is maddening, Aunt Judy, to see men living on who do no good to anybody,—often a deal of harm ; who don't even enjoy life in any real sense of the word ; who have all the good things of the world, carry off all the prizes, and leave others far more deserving to starve and die,

while those who would have revelled in the smallest grain of success and happiness, who worked and strove for it, and often from no selfish motives, go crushed and broken-hearted to their graves. Where is the justice in it? It is monstrous, outrageous."

"Does your new friend say so?"

"Not he; says it's winter now, but spring will come, and laughs at me."

"At your impatience. No wonder. You talk as if you saw the end of all things, and would take it for granted that the successful villain who escapes hanging is happier far than the martyr to truth and right. Why not take your friend's standpoint? Life is but the first chapter of the Eternal Story; the second chapter will answer many questions, redress many seeming wrongs. Is not that the teaching of the Past? How many a battle has been won but by the men who fell, who heard no shout of victory, and wore no medal on their breasts? What was the most glorious crown ever borne by human brow? Was it not a crown of thorns? What is the throne before which a multitude which no man can number have worshipped? Is it not a Cross? Tell me, was *that* Life a failure?"

He made no reply, and she took up her work and stitched away vigorously.

At last he said—"And what of the successful wretch, Aunt Judy?"

"What have you to do with him, Alan? I conclude he will be a wretch still."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE.

“He had been alone  
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,  
That came to him and left him on the heights.”  
WORDSWORTH.

UNTIL lately Alan Wyke had enjoyed the power common to most people of his age, of falling asleep as soon as he gave his mind to the subject ; but since he had begun to take a keen and practical interest in his medical studies ; since he had come into daily contact with sickness, sorrow, and with that strange power which had had such a dark influence over his spirit from earliest childhood, he would often lie awake for hours, going over again and again the events and scenes of the preceding day, asking that old question, “What is it—whither does it lead ?”

Such was the case on the night after the sad scene which he described to his aunt, and consequently he was somewhat later than usual when he made his appearance at the breakfast-table the next morning. On such occasions Miss Judith was given to show much displeasure, and invariably assured him that he was a nuisance to society, and she should shortly get rid of him ; and Miss Faith made kind little excuses for him and petted him more than usual.

The usual formula having been gone through, Miss

Wyke said, "There's a ridiculous fat letter for you from Patty, fully of complaints of the new Lady Wyke, I suppose. What a pity it is the child hasn't something better to do!"

Alan opened the letter and proceeded to read it while eating his breakfast; but in a few minutes he laid it down with an exclamation of horror and dismay.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Wyke, "what's the matter now? Has Andrew murdered anybody?"

But Alan only covered his face with his hand, and groaned, "It's too horrible!"

"Then he's been and done it. I always thought he would sooner or later."

"No, no," said Alan, in a stifled voice,— "it isn't that."

"What is it then? Alan, speak; you are distressing Aunt Faith."

But still Alan stared blankly at the paper, while his face grew white and stern. "There's the letter," he said at last, and Miss Wyke took it and read it aloud.

It was Patty's account of the terrible catastrophe on the hills, and even Miss Judith's brave voice quivered before she had reached the conclusion of the girl's piteous tale; but she read it to the end, and then the three sat and looked at each other. They all knew the place so well—that the whole scene, the sudden gathering of the mountain storm, the sweeping across the hills of the heavy rain-clouds, the close-wrapping mists, the driving rain and snow-showers, the utter desolation and silence,—they could see it all, and before the mind of each the terrible picture formed itself of the lifeless form buried beneath the snow, and not one was inclined to dispute Patty's statement, "It is impossible she can have lived through two such nights, for it happened on Wednesday, and I am writing on Friday, as you see."

At last Miss Wyke spoke. "What are you going to do, Alan?"

"Go down by the night-train. I can do no good; but Patty will be ill."

"I shall go with you," Miss Wyke declared. "It's more than twenty years since I was there, but that child's letter——"

And then she found out that the cook was waiting for orders, and bustled out of the room, leaving Alan still lost in gloomy thought over the letter, and Miss Faith uttering gentle murmurs of distress and wonder, pitying poor dear Andrew, and hoping he would never be so silly again. "He is most unfortunate, now really,—isn't he, Alan?" And then she began wondering at her sister. "Going to travel in the dead of night; really I don't think it's safe; the train may so easily run off the rails. And then I believe it's not generally known, but those night-trains are only run for the convenience of bad characters, who don't care to show themselves in daylight. It doesn't seem right to encourage them; but have you quite fixed on that train, Alan?"

Alan roused himself to say, "Yes," and then she started off again. "If you've quite resolved, it's of no use talking; but I've just remembered that this tiresome new laundress never brings the washing home till quite late in the afternoon, and the things are often wringing wet; I'm quite afraid there won't be time to air them properly. Don't you think you'd better wait till Monday?"

Thereupon Alan shook himself out of his abstraction to explain to the good lady—he was always gentle to her—that he could not rest until he was with Patty. "Think, Aunt Faith, what trouble she must be in."

"Oh yes; it is most unthinking of your father to

keep on marrying these silly women one after another. I can't think where he finds them. How did the last one die?—tumbled down-stairs, or sat in a draught, didn't she? I really can't remember all about them; but as you say, they must be a great trouble to Patty."

"Aunt Judy will be a comfort to her."

"Oh yes, I must go and help Judith to pack, for between ourselves, Alan, she is rather a poor hand at such work," and Alan was not sorry to see her depart.

In the afternoon old Mrs. Rae came, summoned by a message from Miss Wyke—"Leaving town; should like a word with you." What the word was Miss Wyke did not inform her nephew. He guessed, and probably with reason, that Miss Judith was not altogether easy to leave her sister alone, "to give half her income away to that O'Flaherty and his beggars," as she was wont to say; and that she was bespeaking Mrs. Rae's kindly guardianship for her.

Alan liked the upright, stern old lady, who grasped his hand with a gripe which made his fingers crack, and hoped "he'd find things on the mend when he got home." He could see something of Rie's quick and sudden movements in her grandmother, something too of her bright and earnest look; but the old lady was nearly six feet in height, while little Rie was scarcely five. Watching the grave, determined face beneath the large plain bonnet, and listening to the deep tones of her voice, Alan thought she should have been named Deborah, after the prophetess who judged the chosen people, called them forth to battle, and spurred on the half-hearted to the fray.

She called Miss Judith "my dear," but the soft words sounded unnatural from her lips. "Going down by the night-train? Very sensible—saves time. You'll take



care of him, and he'll take care of you ; and ten to one you'll find it isn't as bad as it looks. Nothing ever is, my dear—nothing ever is. I'm not as bad as I look, am I now, Mr. Alan ?” And she turned so suddenly upon Alan that he had said, “ Oh, certainly not,” before he knew what he was about.

“ And as for him, my dear”—in a lower tone to Miss Wyke—“ perhaps *he* isn't as bad as he looks. We'll see, —we'll see. And if I find the furniture disappearing, and Faith looking more ecstatic than usual, why, I'll write. Now I'm going. Where's my umbrella ? ”

Alan handed her the article in question, a large cotton gig umbrella ; she seized it, and grasping it like a battle-axe, departed.

“ That's a sensible being,” remarked Miss Wyke. “ Alan, when you marry, try and find a woman like Mrs. Rae.”

“ I've been wondering,” replied Alan, “ how Mr. Rae ever found the courage necessary for such an enterprise.”

“ Some day I'll tell you that little story,” said his aunt. “ Now I'm going to pack.”

It was a very cold journey that they had that night, and when they crawled out of the train at the new station at Windermere, both travellers were thoroughly chilled and rather miserable. Alan had ordered a carriage to be ready to convey them the rest of their journey, and they were soon again on their way, speeding along the snowy roads in the early morning. Miss Wyke remarked that this new bit of railway was a convenience, and then forgot her fatigues in the interest of looking out on the once familiar scenes through which she was being carried along, marking the many changes, and wondering that nobody had set to work to drain the lakes or level the hills.

As they drew nearer to his home Alan grew more and more silent. Imagination was busy painting the scene he should find there, and he wondered how it was that his aunt could take so much interest in trifles at such a moment. It did not enter his head that Miss Wyke was talking partly to divert his thoughts, and partly to cover her own nervous and excited feelings, for it was her own old home she was approaching, and she and her brother had never met since they parted in anger twenty years before.

Another long and dreary night had passed. Patty's great fatigue had secured her one night's heavy sleep; but since then she had not slept. Now she stood at the door to greet her brother and aunt, a very ghost of her former self. Alan started back as he saw her pallid, woe-worn face and drooping figure. Was his bright Patty gone for ever, and this grief-stricken girl left in her place?

She was passively receiving but scarcely returning her aunt's kiss, giving no welcome, offering no hospitable attentions. It seemed to Alan that they had somehow changed places; hitherto *she* had been the brightness of his life, now it plainly behoved him to set himself to comfort *her*. He took her into his arms, and kissed brow and cheek and lips, until she clung to him and hid her drooping head on his shoulder. Aunt Judy had seen old Nan on the stairs, and gone forward to meet her, and the brother and sister were left together.

"Patty, don't!" the young man said, as he felt her slight form shaking and quivering in his arms. "I don't believe it can be as you think. I can't say why; but I feel sure it must be a mistake."

She lifted her head and looked at him with sad wonder in her large blue eyes.

"How can there be any mistake?" she said in a choked voice. "Who could live on the mountains in such weather as this?"

"I know, I know," he said; "but yet it seems to me this is too horrible, and I've been thinking about it all night, and I am sure there are places where she might so easily have got into a wrong path, and perhaps wandered ever so far,—perhaps to some farmhouse."

"Alan, as if we had not inquired."

But he persisted.

"Don't give up, Patty, it's not like you."

She drew away from him wearily, as Sir Andrew came into the hall, saying—

"Standing about in all manner of draughts, Patty. Your aunt and brother have just come off a long journey, and would probably like some refreshment, if you could forget yourself for a while and think of others for a few minutes." Then he extended a hand to his son, and led the way into the dining-room, where breakfast was awaiting the travellers.

Patty made her escape on the plea of looking for Aunt Judy, who had gone up-stairs with the housekeeper, and by and by they came down together; Patty calmed and quieted; and Miss Judith brisk and alert as she always was when trouble was around her.

"Yes; I came to look after this child, and she looks as if she needed it. You never had a notion how to take care of anybody but yourself, Andrew," the good lady began, taking up the thread of her conversation at the point where she had left it twenty years before. "Faith and I fled in terror, as you know; but I've come back to rescue this child, if I can. And what about your wife? Have you given up looking for her, and made

up your mind it's all for the best? You look pretty comfortable on the whole."

Sir Andrew stared. He had almost forgotten his sister Judith's brutal manners. He had fully intended to pose as the broken-hearted husband, perfectly unable to eat and sleep, and to be told he looked pretty comfortable was intolerable.

"It is not my way to lose my senses or my self-control," he replied, "and it is not my nature to give up hope until compelled. May I give you some more coffee?"

"No; don't bother,—when I want things I ask for them. Now what do you suppose has happened to her, if you're sufficiently interested to have any ideas on the subject?"

"Impetuous as ever, my dear Judith! Now do finish your breakfast before we discuss this most painful subject. You are really most distressingly abrupt."

"I've done; ring the bell, Alan, and tell the man to clear away. Why, George, my man, are you still in the land of the living? What is it you are saying? You look wonderfully spry."

"If you please, ma'am; if you please, Sir Andrew," said the old man, eagerly, "there's a queer bit of news stirring this morning. Postman says as a man told him some one had come into Parson Gilpin's kitchen talking of a poor body who had been overtook by the storm two or three nights ago, and was sheltering in a shepherd's cottage over Langdale way. Ay, Mr. Alan, Miss Patty, he *said* a servant-maid; but who knows but it may be my lady?"

"Of course, of course," said Sir Andrew, "just as I said,—wandering about the hills in any weather—most improper. People would never suppose she could be a lady. Where are you going, Alan?"

"Where am I going? To the stable to get Dandy saddled, and ride to old Gilpin and find out the truth. Won't you come too?"

"Gilpin's sister's dying; they won't want visitors—and the excitement and suspense. No; I'll not risk it, —you'll be back to lunch?"

"Hardly." Alan waited only to give one cheerful smile to Patty, and was gone. She followed him to the stable, watched him mount, and then ran up to her old nurse's room, where several of the servants were gathered, talking and exclaiming around the old woman. They stopped suddenly when the young lady appeared, and one by one slipped away to finish their surmises and wonderings in the kitchen.

"Nan, I dare not hope," sobbed Patty; but the light in her eyes, the dawn of colour on her cheeks, told a different tale. "If it should not be she, it will be worse than if we had never hoped at all; and they said a servant-girl."

"The tale has come through several, as I understand. So Mr. Alan has ridden right away. Miss Patty, keep up your heart, my lamb, he'll not be long away."

"Nan, I'm almost beside myself, I can't sit still. What shall I do?"

"Where's your aunt, my dearie? Isn't she wanting you?"

"No"—and Patty almost laughed. "She's scolding Sir Andrew. She told him he looked pretty comfortable; and he, he didn't know how to answer her."

"Go to her, Miss Patty; help her to unpack,—she'll do you good. Miss Judith is a rare hand at rousing folks up."

Meanwhile Alan was riding along the slippery roads at a furious rate. More than once Dandy had nearly

lost his footing, but Alan pulled him up and drove him on.

The snow was still covering the hills, but down in the valley it had nearly disappeared, only lingering in patches here and there. The sun was shining, and the air felt less cold than it had been for some days. Alan's heart was full of hope, and as he sped along on his good horse, scarcely sparing him even on the steep ascents, his spirits rose. Surely this rumour could not be but a will-o'-the-wisp, luring them on to fresh despair. Should it prove a delusion, how could he face Patty again? But it must—it should be true.

The quiet of Sunday was in the air; but by the time he approached the little church, the sermon was over, and the people were going home. At a sudden bend of the road, he found himself face to face with the old parson, and checking his horse with a jerk, he was on the ground in a moment, and by his side. Stephen Gilpin was startled out of a reverie by the sudden appearance of the young man; but the abstracted look passed from his face as Alan addressed him, and he said—

“Ha! I'm glad to have met you; you'll save me a deal of trouble. I was just thinking who I could send with a message to the Lowes, for the man should have gone to you instead of coming to me.”

“I've come to know,” Alan gasped out, “what the man told you; we've heard next to nothing; but you know our trouble, and how anxious we are.”

“To be sure. Well, Jim Dent has an old uncle living on the hills, Isaac Phyzacklae by name, an old shepherd, and Dent was uneasy about them because of the snow, thinking they might be wanting food, so he made his way up there last evening, and came in to us

this morning with the story, that a poor creature had wandered there on Wednesday night half dead with exposure to the storm ; that she was very ill, and old Aggy was nursing her. Of course, I thought of Lady Wyke at once, and I asked Dent about her."

"And what did he say?"

"Dent isn't over wise,—was sure the poor body was no lady ; he had seen her boots, and they had scarce a bit of sole to them. He had seen her hat too, a round one, much like his wife's, but with a gull's wing in it. Old Isaac thought she was a servant-girl going home for a holiday, and had lost her way ; but old Aggy was doubtful, and said she was wedded. She had found a wedding-ring, and another in the soaked glove she had pulled off the night she came in. There, that's about all I know."

"It's scarcely likely any one else would have been wandering about the hills just at the same time," Alan said thoughtfully. "Mr. Gilpin, where does this old shepherd live?"

"Don't you know? You've lived all your life in these parts, and don't know Isaac! Well, let me see; come round and put your horse up, and get something to eat, and we'll find some gaiters and thick boots, and go up the hills."

"But it's Sunday, and Miss Gilpin so ill, I oughtn't to trouble you."

"My sister doesn't need me, and I've no other service to-day, so I'll be your guide. I wish we'd a doctor to take with us ; but you can see about that later on."

"You *are* a good friend," said Alan, gratefully. "Patty is almost broken-hearted about Lady Wyke ; it is piteous to see her."

"And your father?" Stephen Gilpin suggested with

a half smile. "Well, I hope we may succeed in restoring his wife to him."

Alan looked at the old man, and thought of the love tale of his youth, and spent some minutes wondering what would have happened if the mother who was but a name to him had been true to her first love. What a mistake it had been!—how happy she would have been as this old parson's wife! Old,—he wasn't really old,—not more than sixty or so—and what a jolly old fellow he was!

Jolly,—a strange word to apply to Stephen Gilpin at this particular period of his life, the eve of his second great trial. He had had a calm and placid existence, since the day when he had acquiesced in the turn of fate; or as he preferred to call it the decree of Providence, which had separated him from his one and only love. He had sorrowed over her early grave; but life had its work and its joys for him still, and his sister had been a congenial companion for many years; now she was going, and life would again lie in the shadows.

Young as he was, Alan could read these thoughts in his companion's face. He knew the Shadow that was resting on the house; it had crossed his path again and again; it was no stranger to him. He knew the meaning of the half-suppressed sigh with which Stephen Gilpin turned to glance at the bedroom window as they prepared to leave the house on their expedition, and he respected the silence which seemed to possess the parson as he tramped on in front up the steep mountain paths, his form somewhat bent, his hands clasped behind his back, his strong stick between them.

It was a long walk; but when the parson stopped, and nodded towards a low stone building at some distance before them, Alan exclaimed—



"There! what a distance she must have walked! I'm afraid it must be a mistake."

But Gilpin smiled.

"I'm much inclined to think we shall find Lady Wyke there," he said. "You must introduce me. I do not know her. But really, Alan, do you mean to say you don't know old Isaac? I thought all the countryside knew the old man."

"Sir Andrew has a particular spite against some old man of that name. Patty knows him, and is always in hot water about her affection for him; but I don't remember to have seen him."

"His wife, old Aggy, was among your earliest acquaintances—she officiated as nurse at your entrance into society, as I have often heard her say. She and your father fell out on that occasion, I fancy."

Alan laughed.

"Small wonder," he remarked. "I say, Mr. Gilpin, we shall be unwelcome visitors, bringing all this water with us—you are in worse plight than I."

"A trifle heavier, I suppose. But in such a lonely spot a visit is seldom unwelcome. Here comes the old man's dog to greet us. He and I are great friends. Now, in a few minutes, your doubts will be settled."

And so it was. A few minutes later they stood in the low cottage, telling their errand to the old shepherd and his wife.

"May I see her?" inquired Alan, too impatient to wait any longer. "Oh, if she's asleep, I won't wake her, you need not be afraid," as old Aggy seemed inclined to refuse him admittance to the inner room. "Just let me have one look at her. I promise not to disturb her."

It was with evident reluctance that the old woman

opened the door a few inches, explaining that the poor thing had really seemed sleeping quietly when she last looked at her, about an hour ago, and she wouldn't have her woke for anything. But Alan was not to be refused.

"We think we know her, and we are so anxious," he urged, and at last, with many misgivings and much grumbling, the old woman submitted.

"Cum oot noo, will ya?" she urged, "and take cear of t' dewer." But her entreaties fell on deaf ears, until Alan had seen all he wished, and then he came softly out, and closed the door as carefully as any sick nurse could have done.

"It's all right?" said the parson, reading the look on his face, and Alan nodded; there was something in his throat just then which made speech impossible. Stephen Gilpin saw it, and to give him time to recover himself, he proceeded to enlighten the old couple as to who their visitor was, and to ask for their account of what had happened.

The old shepherd shook his head, and remarked that he had told his wife he was certain she must belong to somebody; but as to them Wykes, they were a bad lot, and he hoped she had nothing to do with them.

"Na, na, Miss Patty's no that bad, Isaac," said his wife; "but a hope es this isn't Lady Wyke—a dew hope that."

"That's Alan Wyke," said Mr. Gilpin; "he says it is Lady Wyke, and surely he knows."

"Maister Alan!" cried old Aggy, "t' lile baarn es lost his mudther, an t' aald fella hes weddet ageean; waal, if t' pooar boddy be t' wife, dusta knaa what a's thinkin'?"

"Out with it, Aggy—your thoughts are always worth hearing."

"Ya'll be meeakin' gamm oot a me, Maister Gilpin ; bet a's thinkin', a wuddent be stannin' in her shoes—na, that a wuddent."

"Very likely ; you'd not change Isaac for Sir Andrew. But about the lady—is she very ill ?"

Then the old woman told the whole story of the storm—how the wind had howled, and the rain had poured down the chimney, and how uneasy the old dog had been, and how Isaac had been sure that something was amiss. Then he had gone to the door, and the lady—if she really was a lady—had fallen flat down in a faint. How they had had a deal of trouble to get the wet things off her, and put her to bed ; how she had rambled on and talked nonsense, and they had feared she would die—indeed, she might yet, there was no knowing. Fetch a doctor, did you say ? Why, there was nobody to go. Isaac was stiff with rheumatism, and besides, till that very day, the snow had been deep all round the house. No, they'd had no doctor—not that she thought much of doctors—folks died with doctors, and folks died without, it didn't make much difference. She'd doctored her the best way she knew—given her herb tea to make her sweat, and rubbed that stuff on her chest, pointing to a large bottle on the chimney-piece. It had done the old dog a power of good when he'd a sore back—it was real good stuff, and cost a shilling a bottle ; and she'd put every blanket she'd got on the bed—and well, that was about all ; but if she'd been at home, the lady couldn't have had a better bed—that she couldn't.

"Nor better care," said Alan warmly. "We can never thank you enough, Mrs. Phyzacklae."

She didn't want thanks, she assured him. She only hoped the lady would get well ; but if she didn't—

well, she'd be better off than with that wicked old fellow, Sir Andrew Wyke.

Here the parson interposed.

"We must be thinking whether the lady can be moved, and how it can be managed," he said. "There's no room to spare in this cottage, Alan; and if I don't mistake, Aggy has given up her bed to Lady Wyke."

Alan had guessed as much.

"But what's to be done?" he asked; "how can she be moved in such weather?—no carriage can come near the place."

Then the old shepherd interfered, to declare that nothing could be done till the lady was better.

"Ya'll ga heeam an' tell foaks, an' wa'll teeak ceean an' see ta her, seeam as if she wes an aald sheeap."

"But it is hard on you, Isaac, and your wife too, to keep you from your bed."

"Wa dew as wa can; a rakkan wa'll niver rew it—t' wes give es ta dew, an' wa dew it."

"Whist!" said Aggy, holding up a finger, and Alan started up and turned towards the inner room. This time he was beforehand with the old woman, and so hasty were his movements, that he had almost broken his head against the beam which supported the low roof of the little bedroom, before she had time to warn him to go carefully. There was very little light in the tiny room, and scarcely space to stand between the bed and the door; only one small pane of glass admitted the light of heaven, and through it nothing but the sky could be seen.

Hester Wyke was awake, but as Alan thought, not perfectly herself. Her long dark hair was scattered over the pillow, her eyes turned restlessly from one object to another. She looked at Alan, but he was uncertain

whether she recognized him—perhaps he was too much in the shadow for her to see his face. He drew near, and took her hand. Then she started, her eyes rested on him, and she said—

“Patty?”

“Patty is not here,” he said; “but she will come to-morrow. She will be so glad to hear you are better. You have been ill, Lady Wyke.”

“Ill?—no; but sleepy, very sleepy. Where am I?—I forget. Is it raining still? Will it never stop raining? Is it Alan?”—there was a sudden look of increased consciousness. She laughed and said, “Oh, I remember now—I was half asleep. Tell Patty to come and see me, Alan.”

“She’ll be here to-morrow, no doubt of that, and then we must see about getting you home.”

“Home?” she said; “yes, I suppose so. What day is it, Alan?”

He told her, and she seemed much surprised.

“I feel so confused,” she said. “Wasn’t it yesterday I was caught in the storm and took shelter here? Yes, of course, I must go home; but I was so tired. I am tired still.”

“Cum away, a tell ya,” said old Aggy, in a loud whisper; “ya mud let her bide. If a hed summat to mak broth, she’d dew fine. A’ll hev ta boil t’ aald dog, fer sartan.”

The old dog, hearing himself mentioned, came and looked up inquiringly into Alan’s face. Old Isaac and Mr. Gilpin asked—

“How is she?”

“Better. She’ll dew; but she’s reeavalan a bit yet. She’s ter’ble weak.”

“She’ll have to stay a day or two longer, I expect,”

said Mr. Gilpin ; "but she couldn't be in better hands. You must go now, and leave her to old Aggy for another night ; to-morrow we must see what can be done."

They stayed a while longer consulting. Alan promised to stop at the nearest house, and see if any meat could be procured, and bring a doctor as soon as possible. Then they took their leave, and sped away down the hill-side as fast as the slush and snow would let them.

"Much the matter, do you think ?" the parson asked when they were clear of the house.

"Can't say. The old body wouldn't let me stay by her long enough to look at her, but her breathing was not much affected. No doubt she has a heavy cold, and is utterly exhausted ; I hope nothing worse."

"Aggy is reckoned a good nurse, but her appliances are small. Go on, Alan, if you are impatient ; don't wait for me."

"Thanks ; I want to fulfil my promise about the meat. Did you hear the old dog was to be made into beef-tea for the want of better materials ?"

It was almost dark when Dandy was able to congratulate himself on having accomplished a most detestable day's work, and brought his master, splashed, cold, and muddy, safely home. The good horse must have wondered if his rider had lost his wits—what else could have made him whistle and sing along the last mile of the homeward journey ? Alan was thinking of Patty, thinking too how much more cheerily the day had ended than he had thought possible that morning, and almost forgetting anxiety in the reaction from despair. He knew well that Patty would be listening, listening all day long for the sound of Dandy's feet. From some

distance he could discover the light in her window, and from time to time make out the outline of her figure as she threw open the sash, and leaned out to watch. Therefore he whistled and sang: she would know his voice, and hope would come to her relief.

It had indeed been a long day at the Lowes. Miss Judith had kept things lively in her grim fashion all the morning, but her night's journey had tired her, and after lunch she had settled herself by the drawing-room fire, and dozed away the afternoon. Sir Andrew had retired to his study, and beguiled the long hours of suspense in his usual way by giving his whole mind to the exciting search for mistakes in the tradesmen's accounts; but even this entrancing occupation had proved insufficient to engross his thoughts.

The servants in the kitchen were convinced that he was already giving his attention to the consideration of a possible new alliance—"which," said Mrs. Grimes, "is as certain to come to pass as eggs is eggs." The footman, who had made a reconnoitring expedition under the excuse of making up the study fire, reported that the old wretch was sitting there doing nothing at all but staring right in front of him, and as for fretting, "he's done nothing of the kind, for he took out his handkerchief while I was there, and he hadn't so much as unfolded it, so there!"

"Fretting," said Mrs. Grimes; "didn't you tell me he grumbled at the soup?—that looks like fretting, doesn't it? There, he's ringing for lights. Let him wait, Joe; sitting in the dark's good for such as he. Who knows, maybe he's interviewing the ghosts of all his poor wives while he's sitting there. Hark! there's the bell again. But what's that I hear? Horse's feet in the drive. George, George! 'tis Mr. Alan, and there's Miss Patty

calling her aunt. What does she say? Mercy on us! what is it she's saying? Do somebody tell me."

"Most extraordinary," said Sir Andrew, as they sat listening to Alan's tale a few minutes later, "most extraordinary! Lady Wyke is caught in a storm, and, instead of coming home, she prefers to walk ever so far and take shelter in an old shepherd's hut. This is what young ladies call having an adventure, I suppose. And Alan comes home to set our minds at rest—not that I was seriously uneasy, for I was always sure she was safe. I say he comes into the house with the news, and all the servants rush out of the kitchen to meet him, as if the house was on fire. No notion of decorum—a more unruly rabble I never beheld."

"And my hair was all about my ears, and Aunt Judy's cap was nowhere. No one was perfectly well behaved but Sir Andrew," said Patty. "Aunt Judy, excuse me, I must just try your cap on the cat. Timothy will look lovely in it."



## CHAPTER XIV.

### PARSON GILPIN.

"The outward shows of sky and earth,  
Of hill and valley, he has viewed,  
And impulses of deeper birth  
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie  
Some random truths he can impart,  
The harvest of a quiet eye,  
That broods and sleeps on his own heart."

WORDSWORTH.

IT was Christmas Eve before it was judged safe to bring Lady Wyke home. Rheumatic pains had followed upon the severe cold she had taken—"and you'll have to take rare care of her through the winter," was the doctor's verdict, when he paid his first visit to her at the Lowes. He was speaking to Sir Andrew, but he looked at Patty, and she accepted the charge, saying penitently—

"Better care than I took of you on the hill—that's what he means, dear Lady Wyke."

"Ay, ay, no more running about the hills in rain and snow. But we are going to have a mild winter, Sir Andrew. The snow's all cleared away, except right at the top of the hills: Not Christmas weather, is it?"

"Patty," said Miss Judith solemnly that evening, when Lady Wyke had gone early to bed, and Sir Andrew had also disappeared, "you're not a child, and

it's of no use to pretend you are ; you've got your wits, and I suppose you use them. You ought to protect that poor thing from other things beside cold and wet."

"Aunt Judy, I know ; but can't you tell her—you are older than she—tell her to stand up for herself? Sir Andrew treats *you* with respect, and he lets me alone. Why should his wife be nagged at all day long?"

"She *is* his wife, that's the reason—his property—tied to him—can't get away."

"She must have had a rare holiday up with old Isaac and Aggy. Aunt Judith, why is Sir Andrew so mad to think she has been with them? Why does he hate those old folks so mortally? Alan says Mr. Gilpin told him that old Aggy was his nurse."

"Old Aggy his nurse?" said Miss Judith. "Ha, I know now. When Lady Alice was taken ill, the fine nurse she had engaged was somewhere in the north of Scotland, and couldn't come, and they fetched Aggy Phyzacklae. She wasn't exactly old then, and she was counted a good nurse by the country folk, and so, I think, she was. But Andrew had his cranks then as he has now. He had worried and frightened poor Alice out of her senses, and Aggy and he came to high words. She was big and strong, and she fairly turned him out of the room. Well, poor Alice died. She said it was *his* fault, he said it was hers. I remember it all now, and Alan, poor squealing infant, how he pined for want of his mother! Old Nan remembers it all too, no doubt."

"And you went away, and left poor Alan to the care of Sir Andrew, Aunt Judy? It was too bad of you."

Miss Judith knitted on in silence, and Patty, twisting the fringe of the sofa blanket round her fingers as she spoke, went on—

"Poor Lady Wyke! Sir Andrew had such a mild, forbearing air to-day. I know she felt she had made a fool of herself, and was half persuaded that she had somehow forgotten what was due to *him* when she took refuge from the storm in old Isaac's cottage, wore old Aggy's night-dress, and washed in a pewter basin. He will never let her forget it. Now I should boast of it, repeat my charming experiences all round the neighbourhood, and go constantly to see my two old friends; but she will not dare to do anything of the kind."

"What has your father given those two old people for all their trouble, I wonder?"

"Didn't Alan tell you? Old Aggy wouldn't take a penny of Sir Andrew's money, and forbad Isaac to touch it. But Alan settled that. He gave her all he had in his pocket, and said, 'It isn't Sir Andrew's money at all, Aggy, it is my mother's, and you were good to her in her trouble;' and the old lady cried, and put her arms round Alan's neck and kissed him. Wouldn't you have liked to have been there? Old women have always had a fancy for kissing Alan, and he hates it so."

"Where's Alan been all day?"

"He went to Langdale this morning. Poor Miss Gilpin was buried two or three days ago, and I told him he ought to go and see Mr. Gilpin. Alan likes that old man."

"Old! Stephen Gilpin isn't old."

"Isn't he? He's grey-headed and stoops."

"He always stooped, even when he was young and thinking of getting a wife. He had better have married. He's one of those people who can't get on alone, and so his women-folk have to give up their own plans to suit him—such absurdity!"

"Little Rie is coming to live with him, Alan says."

I'm so glad. I used to like little Rie, and they say she's little Rie still. Is she pretty, Aunt Judy?"

"No; pretty—no, indeed! How could one of those Raes be pretty, or a Gilpin either? The Raes are cut out of granite, the Gilpins out of grey slate."

"What a horrible notion! Is she really cold and hard and stony?"

"No, not a bit."

"Aunt Judy, don't be provoking. Tell me about her."

"I've no doubt Alan has described her to you; he saw a good deal of her during those few days she was staying with us at the beginning of the month."

"Oh, but a man's description is worth nothing; we see things so differently. He said she was so vehement and enthusiastic, it was quite fatiguing to be with her. That's all nonsense, of course. He wouldn't say whether she was pretty."

"She isn't; I told you so."

"I shouldn't wonder if I thought her so. There's Alan just come in, and Sir Andrew telling him he won't have the horses out so late at night, and worrying about that coat again."

"What coat?"

"Alan hangs his coat on the wrong peg—he's done it all his life. It's the first thing I remember about Alan, Sir Andrew scolding about it. Men are queer animals. What is it now? Oh, going up-stairs without changing his boots, wearing out the stair-carpet. Aunt Judy, for goodness' sake don't break that coal, it's so extravagant. You don't know what a price coals are in this part of the world."

"Patty, child, go and tell your father that he'll wake Lady Wyke if he makes that noise."

"I wish I was old Aggy," muttered the girl, as she opened the drawing-room door. "I wonder what men are made of? Alan, is it you or old George that is making this fearful noise? Lady Wyke has just gone to bed. Oh, Alan isn't here. Who was it, Sir Andrew?"

But Sir Andrew was retreating to his den, and did not think it worth while to answer his daughter. A few minutes after Alan made his appearance in the drawing-room, and was told by his sister that he had grown extremely stupid of late.

"You used to have the sense to come in the back way when you were late," she said, "and then nobody was any the wiser."

"I am not late," he replied, "and it is a beautiful night. I wish you'd been with me, Patty."

She made a grimace.

"Visits of condolence are not in my line," she said. "Did you find out when Rie is coming?"

"She arrived to-night quite unexpectedly. Her uncle had made no preparations for her, and was quite at a loss to know how to accommodate her, the house being all upside down, as he remarked."

"Didn't she write to say she was coming?" inquired Miss Judith.

"No. She said that last night it had come into her head that Christmas would be dull for her uncle all alone, and she had said so to her grandmother, who had thereupon said, 'Go and pack, child,' and so she had packed, and started by the first train this morning."

"Just like Susannah Rae," remarked Miss Judith. "And Stephen Gilpin was glad to have the child, no doubt?"

"Oh, he brightened up wonderfully. Her hand isn't well yet. She has it in a sling, of course, but she took

the teapot out of his hand, and moved about in the peculiar quick lively way of hers, so that he could do nothing but watch her. She seemed almost to bewilder him, but she took his thoughts from his troubles for a while at least. Patty, will you go to church there to-morrow, and see your old friend?"

"To-morrow?—oh, Christmas Day. Yes, if you like," and with a sister's quick intuition she thought, "Is he going to fall in love with Rie? Poor boy! I'm afraid he's terribly susceptible. I should have thought he had seen enough of marriage. I'm sure I have."

Miss Judith, too, may have had similar imaginings. She looked hard at her nephew over her spectacles. She, too, had seen enough of marriage, and wondered if Alan was likely to follow in his father's steps. Alan, meanwhile, was thinking of far different matters. Little Rie's appearance had been a pleasant interruption to rather a sad interview, for he and Stephen Gilpin had somehow drifted into a train of thought and talk not uncommon to those who have recently parted from one who has shared their daily life, and who, having followed the lost one to the furthest limit of mortal ken, have scarcely made up their minds to retrace their steps, and let the things of time and sense resume their sway.

Alan hardly knew how they had come to speak their thoughts aloud. He had spoken of his new acquaintance, Falconer, and of his belief in a future life. Gilpin had listened with interest, and Alan, while he sat and talked with his aunt and Patty of all manner of indifferent topics, was still in reality going over again the ground he had trodden with the sorrowful old man that afternoon.

"Hardly a fit moment," he had said, "to discuss such

a weighty subject, Alan. The light has gone from me, and the intense silence of the grave has taken hold of me. I am groping in the dark, and struggling after the hope which was certainty a few days ago, but now seems to have slipped from me. Somewhere she is, but where, we cannot tell; but wheresoe'er God hides her, it is well."

And Alan had replied in words which he afterwards regretted, so cold and heartless did they seem when he thought about them.

"How can you know that? For though we cannot prove that the dead are dead, neither can we prove that they are not."

He remembered with pain the sad, dispirited look which had come over Gilpin's face as he replied—

"You are echoing my own faint-heartedness, Alan. All day I say, she is dead, she is dead, and yet I know she is not."

"That," Alan had said, "is *the* one thing I care to know."

"Ay, ay," the old parson had replied. "As Goethe said, 'He is dead even in this world who has no belief in another.'"

And then a silence had fallen upon them, and Alan, thinking over their conversation afterwards, could not recall all that had passed, nor the connecting links. The words that lingered most in his thoughts were something to this effect.

"Your God, Alan—for I see you have a God whom you adore—is not a mere personification of Power, but is loving, just, and good, or rather Power, Justice, Love, and Goodness—a Perfect God. But to imagine that He has created creatures capable of perfect happiness, desirous of all good things,

and above all craving immortal life, while He refuses to grant it them, is surely to deny His justice, love, and power. If He is perfect, He must will perfection in His creatures; if He is not perfect, if He is not Love, Justice, and Power, He is not my God."

"Sometimes I doubt," Alan objected, "that this craving for Immortality is by any means so widespread as you would say."

"Do you? I *never knew* any one, however ignorant or base, who did not, in some form or other, cling to the belief in a future state. The rough, unlettered, unthinking shepherd-folk who tramp along the roads and fellsides after their sheep, seeming not much wiser than they, have still this difference—they hope to live for ever. I know something of them, Alan, and so it is."

"It is little more than instinct with them."

"Ay, ay; but whence came that instinct? Was it given merely to be disappointed?"

Much more had passed between them. The old parson had nothing priestly or parsonic about him, and Alan liked him well. "Take your own way," he was wont to say to his rough flock. "I tell you what I believe, but I cram none of my opinions down your throats. Take them, or leave them, just as you like. I'm no quack doctor puffing his wares. Come to me when you want me, and you'll hear what I think."

It was this straightforwardness that drew Alan Wyke and many more towards the Langdale parson.

They went to the service the next morning in the little grey church on the mountain-side—Miss Judith, Patty, and her brother. The snow had vanished from the sides of the hills, and only lingered in bright



sparkling points on the mountain tops. The roads were bad, but overhead the sky was clear, and the little church, having been just re-built and restored, looked bright and cheery.

There was the new-made grave outside, and a cross of yew lay upon it. The villagers paused to look as they passed it by, many a one saying, "Ay, but she was good, was Miss Gilpin ; t' aald man 'll miss her sewerly ;" and little Rie, sitting somewhat forlorn in her strange seat, felt that they viewed her with little favour. Her face brightened up when she saw Miss Judith ; but Alan, looking at her, thought how barren of opportunities for the exercise of her ardent spirit that little mountain home must seem after the great London parish, and the hungry multitude ever crowding along its streets. No great sphere of usefulness in India, no hard labour among the heart-broken in London, no great deeds to be done for God. He was sorry for the girl, and thought he knew how hard it had been for her to lay aside her visions of glorious service, and take up cheerfully the humble duty that had been laid upon her. How quiet and dull and sleepy the valley must seem to her after the rush of the great city ; how placid and comfortable looked the worshippers in that little church compared with those in the far-away sanctuary where she had been used to meet her God. He thought he could read these thoughts in Rizpah's face, so resolutely cheerful, so pathetically brave throughout the service. Patty, he knew, would meet her with congratulations that she had exchanged London for a country life ; but Patty did not know her. Miss Judith did, and her greeting was characteristic.

"Glad to see you, child. There's work for you here, even in this out-of-the-way corner of the world. Don't

fancy there are no sick brats, and stupid brats, and wicked brats among these mountains to be coddled and taught and scolded. Oh, there's plenty for everybody to do, if they've a mind to do it."

And Rie's face dimpled with smiles at the familiar style of speech, so that Patty, examining with a critical eye, and recalling her last night's suspicions, said to herself—"If she isn't pretty, she's at least unlike any one I ever saw. How her eyes speak, and laugh, and love all at once! What does Alan think of her? I must and will find out."

But Alan apparently had no thought of Rie. After shaking hands with her, he had left her to his aunt and sister, and walked on with the parson. Patty was puzzled, as sisters often are, when they try to see further than circumstances warrant.

They walked some little way to where the carriage was waiting for them, the girls talking with pleasant anticipations of frequent meetings; but as Miss Judith was about to say good-bye, Rie suddenly bethought herself.

"Oh, Miss Wyke," she said, "Grannie gave me a message for you, and I had almost forgotten it. She said she would write to you in a few days; but in the meantime I was to tell you that she was not quite easy in her mind about Miss Faith. She is not ill, or anything of that kind; but there is something mysterious about her. She told Grannie last Monday that she had made up her mind to a great step. What it was she did not seem inclined to say. Grannie was not sure whether it was choosing a new dress or going into a sisterhood. Mr. O'Flaherty has a pet sisterhood, you know."

Miss Judith had turned sharply round, with one foot

on the step of the carriage, to hear Rie's message. Her face grew stern as she listened ; but she turned and got into the carriage before she made any reply. Then it was brief and decided.

“ I shall go home to-morrow, Rie.”

## CHAPTER XV.

### MISS FAITH'S DECIDED STEP.

"Love from her tender years her thoughts employed."

IT was not often that Miss Judith Wyke was turned from her purpose, and her purpose being to depart southward on the morrow, all her preparations were made with that object in view, in spite of all that Patty and Alan and Lady Wyke could say to dissuade her. Even Sir Andrew, who had no great talent for saying pleasant things to his family, went to unusual lengths in his attempts to change her purpose.

"You do not often pay us a visit, Judith, it is absurd to cut it so short; surely Faith is old enough to take care of herself; you have made a baby of her all her life."

Miss Judith, however, was resolute. But to Alan's remark, "I shall go too," she offered strenuous resistance.

"You're wanted here for awhile," she said. "Look at Patty; the child is growing ugly lines on her face, and Lady Wyke and she will begin to quarrel if they are left to amuse each other all day long till the bright weather comes; and as for you and your hospital, I don't see that you do each other much good." And when Alan, with the courtesy more common thirty years ago than now, demurred at the idea of his aunt

travelling alone, she annihilated him instantly with—"Don't imagine *I* want you."

So it was settled, but the next morning brought different ideas.

"Such a budget of letters for you, Aunt Judy; one from Aunt Faith among them. Come, perhaps it will set your mind at rest, and make you alter your plans."

Now Miss Faith's letters were always long, frequently incoherent, and always rather tedious to read. Her sister sighed as she looked at the three sheets of fine running hand, written in faint lilac ink, and entirely devoid of stops.

"Susannah Rae must have been dreaming," she said, as she laid down the first sheet. "There's nothing the matter. The dining-room chimney has been smoking; the cook has had two policemen to supper three times last week,—what does that signify? Faith has been making a scrap-book for Mr. O'Flaherty's little sister; she is thinking of consulting Mr. Cutthroat about her hair, which is turning grey. Of course it is,—what then? I can't really read all these pages; if there's anything wrong, it will be at the end." She took up the third sheet, and began reading in the middle. "You see I write from Dover; he wished to see Paris, and all places are the same; he needs change of scene. I need nothing now; love and sympathy, dear Judith—love and sympathy are balm and life to me."—"What's this! what's this!" cried Miss Judy.—"Paris,—he,—love and sympathy,—balm and life; what does it all mean?"

"Read on, Aunt Judy," suggested Alan, while Patty came and peeped over her aunt's shoulder, and, with a suppressed laugh, pointed to the signature at the end, which was "Faith Wyke. Oh! I forgot. I suppose I

ought to put Faith O'Flaherty; but it all seems like a dream,—a sweet, sweet dream."

Miss Judith sat bolt upright, staring at the paper. "Faith O'Flaherty!" she said at last, and a pathetic look of helpless distress came over her fine face. "*Poor* thing, *poor* thing!—why did I leave her?"

"What, what?" said Sir Andrew, who had not paid much attention to what was going forward. "Faith married! Well, she's been thinking about it long enough; you can't accuse her of being in a hurry. What's the matter, Judith?—you seem terribly upset."

But Miss Judith made no reply; the long wandering sentences of the lines had suddenly become all engrossing; she read them again and again, as if somewhere there might be concealed some word which would explain away that fatal signature. Faith had been dreaming for the greater part of her life, might not this too be nothing but a dream?

Lady Wyke meanwhile was seeking of Patty and Alan an explanation which they did not seem to find it easy to give.

"You see, as you don't know Aunt Faith," Patty said, "you cannot well understand."

"If you knew this O'Flaherty," Alan said, "you'd have no difficulty in understanding Aunt Judy's horror. He's a fool, and he's five-and-twenty years younger than my aunt, and of course he wants her money."

"Aunt Faith is such a dear old thing," said Patty; "perhaps he really cares for her."

"Stuff," said Miss Judith. "I never yet met with a man who cared for anything but his dinner."

"Bravo, Aunt Judy, you're getting better," said Alan. "Now, do let me read this letter. I'll answer for it, I'll find some comfort in it yet."

But Miss Judy clutched at her letter and put it in her pocket ; then taking up another, she said—

“This is from Susannah Rae. I wonder what she has to say for herself.”

“I have been dying to know who wrote that letter; no difficulty in reading that ; she must write with her husband's walking-stick.”

“At any rate it is not three sheets,” said Miss Judy. “If you'd go away, Andrew, I'd be obliged to you. Those children and I understand each other—you and I do not. Shut the door after you ; you may listen outside if you like. Your husband, Hester, thinks all women fools, and as I've a weakness, which he has not, for my own flesh and blood, I don't care to discuss this unlucky business in his presence.”

“Aunt Faith is a sweet old thing,” repeated Patty ; “but what does Mrs. Rae say ?”

Miss Wyke read—

“DEAR JUDITH,

“Bad news are no better for keeping. Faith was married to this O'Flaherty at St. Luke's, yesterday morning. I went to your house in the afternoon, and saw them just starting for Paris. He wanted to go, she said. The house was in a mess,—chimney-sweeps and such folks in it ; stair-carpets up. She had told them she was going away, and that they were to clean. I asked if they were coming back to live there, and she looked at me in her dreamy way, and said, ‘Yes, of course, where else should they live ?’ So, Judith, you will have a private chaplain, and your nephew will have a nice young companion, as Miss Faith remarked. Now, bear up, my dear, things often turn out better than we expect. My husband and I always

say that when we look back on our married life. No time for more.

"Yours ever,

"S. R."

"A nice young companion for me!" broke in Alan. "Aunt Judy, do tell Lady Wyke what sort of an animal this man is! It will do you good to relieve your feelings."

But Miss Wyke was not to be tempted.

"I verily believe, Alan," she said, "that there is something in this hint of Mrs. Rae's. Aunt Faith has taken this *decided step* partly out of compassion for you. She was always pitying you for your want of companions."

"Oh, I declare, that is too bad, Aunt Judy. In your tenderness of heart you excuse Aunt Faith by laying the blame on me. Did ever a woman marry for the sake of giving her nephew a companion?"

"I don't know, I sure. This craze for marrying is past my comprehension. Excuse me, Hester, I am an old maid to the backbone. But it seems to me it's idleness that makes people marry. The busy people have no time to think of it. Here's Andrew, with nothing on earth to do, always at it. I leave Faith to amuse herself for a fortnight or so,—when I'm at home I keep her busy;—left to herself, what does she do, but get herself tied to a good-for-nothing simpleton without a sixpence in the world? But what's the good in talking? Alan, tell the man I don't want the carriage this morning, I am not going home to-day. Where's the use?"

"Shall I go after them and bring Aunt Faith home?" inquired Alan, when he had given the order and returned to the breakfast-room.

"No," said Miss Judith, grimly. "They're married,



and that's an end of it. A *decided step*, indeed,—she'd better have cut her throat. That's the worst of marriage, there's something so hopeless about it. No use saying, 'Cheer up, things will mend'; they only go from bad to worse. What's the matter, Alan?—what are you laughing at?"

"Your view of the holy estate of matrimony, Aunt Judy."

"Well, what is there about that? Oh, Lady Wyke—Hester, my dear,—excuse me; I'm a brute, as these children have no doubt told you long ago. But happily we're not all made after the same pattern; and of course, what would be hateful to me may be quite agreeable to you. I hope so, I'm sure."

"Every rule has its exceptions," said Lady Wyke, faintly, "but I am sorry about your sister, it seems so sudden and unsuitable. Will they really live with you?"

This was a question which opened before Miss Wyke's mind another prospect of dismay and difficulty. The helpless and hopeless way in which she replied, "I have not considered that matter yet," brought Patty to her side, to hug and kiss her and say—"It is horrid for you, Aunt Judy; I wouldn't live with them,—I really wouldn't."

"Come," said Miss Wyke, shaking herself, "we've discussed this absurd business long enough; and after all, what will it matter a hundred years hence? And even now, what does it matter to any one in the world, except two old women? Alan, get away to your books! How you do waste your time! Patty, go and see to the house-keeping—Lady Wyke is not to go about the house and get into draughts."

"Oh, I'll wrap up," said Lady Wyke, drawing a soft

woollen wrap around her ; " Andrew likes me to see to things myself."

" Yes, and get into draughts and catch cold, I know," replied Miss Wyke. " My dear, I'm out of temper to-day, and you must be kind to me. Just sit by the fire and coddle yourself, and make Patty run about for you ; and as for Andrew, we'll settle him. Here, Patty, take the keys and go."

It was curious how Miss Judith bent people to her will. Alan went off laughing, and Patty followed, to talk over poor Aunt Faith in private with her brother, and then with old Nan in the housekeeper's room ; and Miss Wyke seated herself by the fireside with her letters in her lap, and a very pre-occupied look on her brow.

But before long she folded up her letters and put them away in her pocket ; and at the same time, by a great effort, smoothed away the wrinkles from her brow, and straightened her dress across her knees. Then she looked at her sister-in-law with the air of a person inquiring, " What is the next thing to be done ? " apparently discerned something which did not please her, and took a sudden resolution.

" Now, my dear," she said suddenly, " I wish you would keep me company in my idleness, and come and warm your feet on the fender. What wretched fires they keep in this house, to be sure ! That's Andrew's doing, I know—one of his fads ; but Patty should manage better. Now, Hester," she went on, " I sent those children away, because I wanted to make my peace with you. I'm ashamed of myself—that absurd letter upset me ; but if I hadn't been an idiot I shouldn't have been so disturbed by a trifle. Now forget me and my fuss. I've wanted to have a quiet talk with you ever since I came ; but there hasn't been a chance for me. But as

I'm not going home to-day, we shall have time to know each other better. Now tell me all about yourself, and how life wags with you in this gloomy old house—how Patty behaves to you,—and the servants. All the rest I know, and you needn't tell me."

"Patty is very nice to me, and we are great friends; and my life—oh, well, I suppose there is always something which prevents our lives being quite what we hoped they would be."

"Such as, for instance——?" Miss Judy inquired.

"Oh, I can't quite explain what I mean. The servants are most considerate to me and most obliging; but it seems to me—I may be wrong—that everything would go more smoothly here if—how can I explain it?—if they did not all—yes, all—behave so strangely towards their master—towards Andrew. I am not sure that it is wise to discuss such things; but you must see that even Patty and Alan——"

"Yes, yes; I see, I know. You needn't say it if it pains you; and as to discussing these things, it may be wise, or it may be not. I know nothing about that. But I know one thing, that those that stand by often see more of the game than those that play; and I've seen many things happen here that need not have happened, and I didn't speak; well—any one can guess why. But I've been away for twenty years, and I have come back, and see with rather different eyes."

"Yes," said Lady Wyke, nervously. "Perhaps I'm not a good manager. What is it you see? You don't think Andrew is satisfied?"

"My dear, I'm not going to discuss Andrew; we shouldn't agree, and I don't mean to quarrel. I never abuse people behind their backs,—it's of no use. All I'm going to say about him is just this—that if people—and

his own children especially—don't treat him properly, it's his own fault?"

"But why don't they call him father?"

"It sounds strange, doesn't it? But many things sound strange in this house. I asked Alan the same question once, and he said, 'Nobody ever bade me call him father; they called him, Sir Andrew, and so did I—and Patty always did as he did.'"

"That is not all," said Lady Wyke. "There are other things which amaze me all day long."

"Don't trouble about them; make yourself comfortable, my dear. If you were unmarried, like me, you could go your own way, which *is* a blessing. But being married, you can't do that. Now believe me, old maids see a good deal of the game that goes on between husband and wife. It doesn't matter whether I'm talking about Andrew and his wives, or somebody else; but one thing I've noticed—a wise wife never pretends she is strong, or clever, or energetic. If I were a wife—horrible thought!—I'd try to remember never to wait on myself, never to feel particularly strong, never to be able to do anything which he could do for me. Men like to feel their strength, wisdom, general superiority at every turn. Let them have that pleasure."

"But I like to wait on people that I love."

"Don't do it. Sit still there, and ask Andrew to fetch your work-basket, to shut the door, to write your letters for you."

"I shouldn't like to see him do it."

"Well, *I* should; it would be a refreshing sight. Now, my dear, abuse the old maid as much as ever you like; but think over this notion of hers. Now's your opportunity. You *are* weakly; keep it up. Be weakly always; make everybody in this house wait upon you,

but most of all its master ; be quite unable to bear contradiction, or any other kind of tiresome conversation, loud voices or any sort of worry. And whatever you do, never allow that you are strong again."

Lady Wyke gazed at her sister-in-law in much surprise. "What a selfish being you would make me!" she said.

But Miss Wyke's face wore its most earnest expression. "I mean it," she said ; "I'm not joking."

"Really and entirely?" asked Lady Wyke.

"Most entirely. Now I'm going to unpack and get out some of my things, and make resolutions."

Old Nan was standing at the door of her room as Miss Judith passed. The old woman's gentle face was troubled, and her soft blue eyes filled with tears as she came and took hold of Miss Judith's hands, saying, "Miss Judy, dear, I am real sorry for you ; who'd have thought it? Nothing but a lad, Miss Patty says."

"Not much older than Mr. Alan, Nan ; and Faith is so simple, she fancies he loves her."

"Dear, dear, such strange doings ; why can't the right folks come together? Miss Faith, now, was well enough as she was, and this young man could have waited a bit ; needn't have been in such a hurry to get suited with a wife."

"No, indeed, Nan," and Miss Judith went to her own room and sat down by the window, to look at the matter all round, and make her plans.

During all the past twenty years that she and her sister had lived together, and Miss Faith had dreamed of courtship and marriage, the idea that such a dream could take any reality had never seriously troubled her sister. It was a harmless kind of mania—perplexing at times, tiresome often, but nothing dangerous ; she had

grown used to it, and had supposed it would always go on. That poor, gentle, weak-minded Faith would ever realize her dream and be married had seemed too improbable to be taken into calculation.

For an unusually long time Miss Judith sat quite still, considering probabilities. Her sister's chances of happiness—no, not happiness, but comfort—was the main feature of her cogitations; how could she help to secure it, the next? Her own peace and comfort, Miss Judith felt, were gone. "But what does that matter?" said the brave woman to herself. "I have had my share of it, and no doubt been too careful about it. I can keep a corner to retreat to when he becomes unbearable. Perhaps they had better have their own rooms and I mine; but that can be settled later. Poor dear Faith!"

And while Miss Judith was pursuing her meditations up-stairs, in the breakfast-room where they had been talking, Lady Wyke sat still and thought over what they had been saying. She had come back from that strange little episode in the shepherd's cottage to her life as Sir Andrew's wife with very mingled feelings. During her stay there she had had many wild and some desperate thoughts. Old Aggy's dark hints, only half understood, had given her much to think of; she had heard a good deal of that poor sweet Lady Alice, who needn't have died—"no that she needn't; and the others too, as I've heard." The subject had had a strange enchantment for her, though she had told herself it was foolish, and perhaps wicked, to listen. How quietly she had slept the last night or two in that funny little room on the mountain-side, and how hard it had been to sleep at all since her return home! In olden days she would have laughed at the idea of being nervous and fanciful. What had become of her brave spirit and self-control?

Then she thought of Miss Judith's counsel. "Such a thorough old maid," she said, "what can she know about husbands and wives?" But there had been a ring of encouragement in her voice, a sort of suggestion of something to be done, which had braced and cheered Hester, in spite of this natural feeling that her sister-in-law could know nothing about the matter. She turned the advice she had received over in her mind, and as she did so began to be conscious of reviving hope and energy. "I really think," she said to herself, as she moved about the room, setting ornaments straight, and arranging the few books that lay about, "I'll have some new chintz in my bedroom, and brighten it up; it's the dullest room in the house. I'll talk to Patty about it. Mrs. Pudsey said it must be done in the spring; but I don't see why I should wait. I need not trouble Andrew about the matter"—and though conscious of a certain flutter about her heart, this last resolution was wonderfully pleasing to Hester Wyke. For some little time past she had felt incapable of such an exertion of will, and with the revival of effort came self-congratulation and hope.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"WAIT, CHILD, WAIT."

"Bewail not thou thyself with restless haste,  
Nor say God lets thy life run all to waste ;  
Thou hast thyself to master and subdue,  
No easy work, methinks, for thee to do."

C. M. NOEL.

RIZPAH RAE was no small perplexity to her uncle. Alan had not been far wrong when he imagined he could read in her face the struggle of a strong will against what seemed unkindly fate. To Stephen Gilpin her superabundant energy seemed restlessness. The small household duties, which in her weak health had afforded his sister ample employment and interest, his new little housekeeper despatched in the early morning hours, and throughout the rest of the day her eager eyes seemed ever searching for employment ; and at length the vehement spirit broke out.

"Uncle, do find me something to do. I've made my bed three times over, and poked my fingers through your stockings in the attempt to find holes to mend. I've done half the kitchen work, and left Maggie nothing to do ; and you say there's nobody sick or ill in the parish. What *am* I to do ?"

Then Stephen Gilpin fixed his dreamy grey eyes on her animated face, and said—

"Read, child, read."



"Your books are so old, uncle, and I'm afraid I couldn't understand them."

But he went on as if he had not heard her.

"Read, child ; read and think."

"Tell me what to read, uncle."

Then he put on his spectacles, and mounting on a wooden chair began searching on the highest shelves of his small library, while Rie standing beside him waited in tremulous eagerness. He peered up and down, and after much consideration, picked out a small, well-bound book, opened it and carefully read first the title-page, then the next and the next, Rie waiting beside him.

"Uncle," at length she said ; but he was so wrapt in his study that he had quite forgotten her presence. "Uncle, what is it ?"

But he did not hear her. Once or twice he read a few lines aloud, slowly and deliberately, turning page after page. Rie strove hard to repress her impatience, and at length finding it quite impossible to rouse him from his abstracted condition, she slipped away and left him there.

"Yes," he said suddenly, as they sat together at dinner an hour later, "you must read."

Rie did not wish to renew the experience of the morning, so she merely replied in a somewhat depressed tone—

"Yes, Uncle Stephen."

But dreamy and abstracted as Stephen was, his ear was quick and his sympathy keen when once aroused. He heard the doleful tone in Rizpah's voice, and looking at her over his spectacles, said anxiously—

"What is it, child ?—what's the trouble ?"

"Uncle Stephen," cried the girl, "I'm wicked,—don't mind me."

"Come here," he said, pushing back his chair, and holding out both hands to her,—“now tell me, child.”

"No ; why should I ?" she said. "I did not come here to trouble you, Uncle Stephen."

"Then don't trouble me," he said. "Out with it, little woman ; are you moped here with the old man ?"

"You are not old," she said, "and I am not moped, but I want something to do. Oh, you don't understand, but at home with Grannie there was something doing all day long, more than could be done. We were at it morning, noon, and night, and here——"

"Here, there's nothing to do but cheer up an old man ? No, Rie, there *are* other things to do, and they'll come in time. Wait, child, wait."

"But I am young and strong, and the world is full of want and wickedness ; there must be work for me to do." The passion of the girl's ardent nature was burning in her cheeks and sparkling in her eyes. "Why should I wait ?"

The quiet grey eyes met hers with a kind of pitying wonder.

"Why ? Ah, that I cannot say."

"But it must be wrong," she urged, "very wrong, to make myself comfortable here and do nothing, when there is so much misery and sin in the world ; there must be some whom I can comfort or help."

"Must there ?" he said,—"*little* Rie, are you sure ?"

There was an emphasis on the word *little* that brought the colour to the girl's cheeks.

"I am not so *very* young. I am more than twenty, uncle."

"More than twenty," he repeated,—“poor little one !”

"Don't, uncle ; I've had a year's hospital training, and can nurse pretty well."

"Training ; ah, I am glad, and now you shall have time to think, and the work will come, never fear. Now give me my cheese, and we'll put our hats on, and go out and look for something to do, and think how your grandfather is pitying us lazy folks !"

The thought seemed to amuse him ; and Rie, relieved by having told her tale, brightened up, dashed away the tears that had dimmed her eyes, and was soon tripping along the road by his side.

"Gently, little woman," he said ; "we have no trains to catch here, and I'm a deliberate old person ; if we go tearing along at that rate we shall never see the work we are looking for. Hey, little girl, what's the matter ?"—this to a tiny child crying by the roadside. "Tumbled down and hurt your arm ? Never mind,—what ! spilt your milk ? Then we'll go back to David Wilson's and get some more. No money,—well, we'll find some somewhere."

"Well, Betty, what are you doing, standing at your door in this wind ? Looking for the old man,—where is he ? Afraid he's stopping a bit on his way home. Now you go in ; I'll find him, and send him on home. Rie, child, go in and tell Betty what's good for her bad cough, and I'll be back with old John before long. Now, little woman, come this way, I've a view to show you ; the path isn't wide enough for two ; go first,—I walk slowly. This is my temple, here I worship and adore."

But while he talked on in this way, Stephen Gilpin was not without some doubts and misgivings. Had he done well to let this child, with all her fervent aspirations to serve her generation by works of charity, come and bury herself in this lonely spot ? Would she not die of *ennui*, or eat her heart out for very weariness ? Why had

Mrs. Rae sent her? Why had his sister prayed her to come? Women should know best how to deal with a girl; but in this matter surely they were guilty of a mistake; and for his own part he was conscious that the task of finding employment and interests for her would be no small burden to him.

"I wish I'd thought of bringing some of our poor clothes to make," Rie said that evening. "Grannie has always so much to do, and here the people are not so poor. I dare say they can afford to buy their own clothes, and I'm sure they've plenty of time to make them."

Then her uncle rose, and going to an old work-basket which stood under a table on one side of the room, he began to take out and unfold with careful, almost reverent, touch, some coarse garments, which appeared to have been only just begun.

"You might finish these first," he said. Then as Rie darted at them and began eagerly examining them, he said, sadly—"She folded them up, and put them there about a month ago—she did not come down the next day. I forget for whom they were, but it will come to me presently. Some little motherless lassie for whom she thought and cared. Yes, child, there's work to do," and he watched with evident satisfaction as the girl with interest akin to awe looked at the neat sewing, saying—

"My work is not as good as this; I must take pains."

"Yes, take pains," he repeated, thoughtfully, as he paced the room with his hands clasped behind his back. "Take pains; take time;—her work was done when she put that away; yours is beginning. Take time; no haste in God's kingdom," and Rizpah looked up from her work and smiled. She understood his meaning,

and as self-will and sullenness formed no part of her bright, ardent nature, she told herself that no doubt there was something in what he said. She had heard the words, "They also serve who only stand and wait"—but waiting was not at all to her mind. The intense and utter silence of this new home oppressed her; she missed the roar and ceaseless movement of the great world of London, the hum of the many voices, the tramp of the many feet.

"When the birds begin to sing it will be better," she said to herself, "but that is a good while to wait. People talk about the pleasant sounds in nature. I wonder what they mean. I thought at least there would be cock-crowing, but all the cocks seem dead. Once a week or thereabouts a boy goes by whistling, or a dog barks; they don't know how I bless them. Actually there's a ring at the front door. How that bell jangles, and goes on ringing!—it is so delighted to hear itself, it can't make up its mind to stop. Who can it be? Miss Wyke, did you say, Maggie? Why, Patty, how did you come?"

"Alan and I drove over. The horse has dropped a shoe, so we've left him at the blacksmith's, and we're going for a walk. Rie, get your hat and jacket and come with us. How's your uncle?"

"Quite well; he's somewhere about. I'll find him. Perhaps he'll come with us."

Patty was by no means sure that this was what she meant or wished; but she could not say so, and Alan had promptly replied—

"Oh, yes; make him come."

The parson was nothing loath.

He was the best guide in the county, he said. "You young ones scamper about and see nothing; one moun-

tain is as good as another, and all the lakes and streams alike ; and Rie here cares for nothing but waterfalls, and the noise they make. She fancies she finds a faint resemblance to the distant rumble of trains and waggons, omnibuses and carts."

"No, uncle, to the human voice ; there is no music such as that."

"Street cries, you mean. Well, go along, you and Miss Wyke ; Alan must content himself with my sober pace."

But before long the two girls fell back. Rie had heard from Patty the last piece of news, as she termed it, about Miss Faith's decided step, and must communicate it to her uncle. Alan had not told.

"I left that for you, Patty," he said. "Mr. Gilpin has forgotten my aunt by this time."

"Not at all ;" Mr. Gilpin remembered the younger Miss Wyke as well as possible. "The fair, delicate-looking one, very gentle and rather—what shall we call it?—poetic, sentimental? What?—married a young Irish curate—shocking! She should have stayed here—we could have protected her from curates ; wouldn't we, Rie? We don't indulge in such luxuries here."

"Curates?—I should think not, indeed," laughed Rie ; "why, the vicars have next to nothing to do. But I'm so sorry for poor Miss Faith, Patty, and for Miss Judith too. What does she say?"

"Aunt Judy blames herself most bitterly," Alan answered ; "it is her way, you know. She says she ought to have forbidden him the house before she came away."

"Ha, ha!" said the vicar. "Miss Judith is the same unrelenting foe to matrimony still. Alan, beware, and be wise in time. Rie tells me you are lodged under

her hospitable roof when you make your abode in London."

"Uncle, uncle, what are you saying? Miss Judith is a sworn foe to nothing that is good. She is the kindest-hearted woman in the world. Now, isn't she, Patty?"

"No doubt of that," said the brother and sister in one breath.

The Vicar held up his hand with a deprecating air.

"Rie, child, have mercy—don't put odious constructions on my words."

"Oh, but you meant it. I know you did—in your heart of hearts you meant it."

"Meant what? Rie, child, if you can read my heart of hearts, what is it you see there?"

"Cruel thoughts of dear Miss Judith—my friend, and Patty's friend, and Mr. Alan's friend. We are all against you, Uncle Stephen—there is no hope for you."

"I think I will not walk so near the edge of the path; the descent is rocky, and not altogether safe—a push might be inconvenient," said the Vicar, smiling. "Rie, child, are you as good a hater as a friend?"

"I don't know—I hope so. Grannie used to say, 'Don't do anything by halves.' When I begin to hate you, Uncle Stephen, I'll do it with all my heart."

"I believe you," he said. "Now, Rie, now Miss Patty, here's a short cut over this hill; go at it with a will—don't look below you—but up, up!"

They started—Rie with her wonted ardour, Patty saying—

"Pull me up, Alan, I'm not in a mood for climbing."

Stephen Gilpin plodded along at his usual jog-trot pace. Rie was first at the summit, waving her little round hat to the others; then on she darted, and when

they overtook her, she was standing hot and breathless, crying—

"Now, Uncle Stephen, which is the way?—hill rises after hill, and there seems no end to them."

"I brought you up here to see the view," said Stephen Gilpin, waving his hand to right and left, "and all you say is, 'which way next?' Child, if you race through life in this way, you may as well spend it in a mine."

There was a disappointed tone in his voice, and Rie was by his side in a moment; slipping her hand through his arm, she pressed her face against his shoulder, saying penitently—

"I thought it was all in front of me, and never turned to look. Yes, it is lovely—lovely!"

She looked very winsome with that softened look, that half-tearful smile on her eager face, and Patty said to herself—

"What is it about the girl that makes her so different from other girls—so different from me? She isn't pretty, I suppose—and yet I don't know. I can't keep my eyes off her—and Alan? Why"—she drew a long breath as she looked at him—"he seems in worse plight than I. I wonder, does she see it? Does Mr. Gilpin, with that far-away look in his eyes, ever discover what is happening close at his elbow? As yet he is quite unaware. What does he say?—the strange shape of that cloud? My good man, Alan hears nothing you say to him." Then aloud she observed, "It *is* lovely here; but we ought to be getting home, Alan." And Alan awoke from his dream, and offered his hand to Rie to help her down the hill.

They went down more soberly than they had ascended. It was Patty and Rie that talked; the Vicar



was feasting his soul with the loved sights around him, now and then pointing out some special beauty of the scene to Alan, as they loitered behind ; but the latter was strangely inattentive—between him and the landscape there moved a slight girlish figure, and small as it was, it blotted out all the rest.

"You thought I did not know," Patty said to him, long afterwards ; "but I found you out, and saw at once what a scrape you had got yourself into, you silly old boy."

But she said nothing at the time ; she had her doubts how he would prosper in his wooing, and "I will neither make nor mar it," she said to herself ; but as the secret was too cumbersome to be supported alone, it was entrusted to Aunt Judy's keeping, and the two watched closely but secretly over the comings and goings of the infatuated young man.

"Sir Andrew is growing suspicious," Patty told her aunt one day ; "he's always wondering what Alan is about, where he goes, &c. &c. He asked me if I knew—and of course I don't, aunt—it's one thing to suspect, and another to know."

"What did you say ?"

"I said Lady Wyke wanted some particular wool fetched from Kendal, and as nobody ever troubled themselves to oblige her in any way, I hoped Alan had gone to get it for her—but I'm afraid he hasn't."

"Has your father asked Alan himself any questions ?"

"Very likely ; but he'll get nothing out of *him*, Aunt Judy. I hope and trust Sir Andrew will not find this out."

"Perhaps it's all a fancy of yours, Patty."

"Aunt Judy, look at Alan and judge for yourself. When did he ever take so much pains about his dress

in all his life? That is what Sir Andrew has discovered. Then listen to his music in the evenings—nothing at all but love-songs; see how he sits and dreams—even at meals he's always in the clouds, and doesn't hear when you speak to him; and Nan told me yesterday that the servants are beginning to talk, and saying that he is going the way of Sir Andrew."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A VERY WARM RECEPTION.

"And when I raised my eyes above,  
They met with two so full and bright—  
Such eyes ! I swear to you, my love,  
That these have never lost their light."

TENNYSON.

ALTHOUGH it is not to be imagined that the men and the maids in the kitchen at the Lowes spoke their opinions so plainly, or so openly, as to reach his ears, the chronicler of Alan Wyke's history, mental and moral, feels bound to confess that the conviction alluded to in the last chapter had more than once obtruded itself on his own inner consciousness. He was not himself, and there were moments when he was painfully conscious of the fact, and more than half afraid that others beside himself had found it out. Patty looked anxiously, almost entreatingly, at him ; Lady Wyke feared he was not well ; his aunt, he fancied, was studiously intent on not noticing him ; Sir Andrew more aggravating in his watchfulness than ever before.

Yes, it was too true, he was not himself. What ailed him, he did not think it necessary to consider. It was a pain which absolutely prevented anything like study, which drove him continually into the open air, and, as the groom more than once remarked, always in the

same direction. It was an unusual kind of pain, since Alan was conscious of no desire to be rid of it, had no thought that it could ever pass away, or even diminish in degree. It disturbed his nights, but that gave him no concern. Before many days had passed it affected his sight to such an extent that one face was ever before his eyes, to the absolute exclusion of all other countenances. It played tricks with his hearing, so that the birds sang, and the winds sighed, one name only. His pen even caught the trick, and was constantly on the point of writing this name. What was to be done? Alan resolved he would go back to London, rush into work, and be rid of his torment. The next day, nay, the next hour, he thought he would stay a week longer, perhaps a month, nay, why should he go at all? And so matters stood, when one evening Miss Judith suddenly startled him by the remark—

“I am going home the day after to-morrow; I suppose you are coming with me, Alan?”

She did not look at him. He had a notion that she refrained from doing so on purpose, but Patty was anxiously watching him, and Sir Andrew laid down his paper to hear his answer.

Alan deemed it wisest to appear utterly indifferent and unconcerned, so he merely replied—

“Going so soon, aunt? Yes, I think it’s time I went back to work.”

And Patty looked relieved, while Sir Andrew muttered “Work!” in a tone indicative of the utmost scepticism.

“He does work, Andrew,” Miss Judy replied, and Lady Wyke added, “I’m sure he does.”

“Alan has never done a stroke of real work in his life,” his father replied. “How he scraped through

school and college is a mystery to me. It is always a misfortune to a young fellow to have a small income. You'll see he'll never earn a penny."

"You've an attack of gout coming on, Andrew," said Miss Judith severely. "Hester, you've too good a cook."

"I never had gout in my life, as you very well know, Judith; it is not in our family."

"You'll introduce it then; fidgets and fuss are suppressed gout. Alan, what's the best train? I brought you down: going back I leave the whole business to you."

Alan told the hours of the several trains, and entered into the discussion concerning their respective merits; but though he talked quietly of the journey and what time they should start, Patty was by no means certain that he meant to go. As for Alan himself, he had no idea what he meant to do; he had still one day's respite, and he would make the most of that. He hoped he had baffled Sir Andrew's curiosity by his ready acquiescence in his aunt's plan, and for the moment that was all he thought about.

One more day! What did it matter that cold cheerless winter held all nature in its iron grip, that the trees were bare and black, and everything around seemed at its dearest? Alan had ceased to be sensible of surrounding objects. The weather, politics, the world at home or the world abroad, all the ordinary subjects of conversation had suddenly become of no importance, or worse than that, tedious and wearisome to the last degree. He wished people would not pester him to talk, conversation had become so inane that he could not listen to it, and was constantly surprised to find that some one had addressed him and was expecting an answer. He awoke the next morning with an uneasy

consciousness that, as it was his last day at home, somebody, possibly Lady Wyke or Patty, would suggest that he should spend it in their company. Weighed down with this foreboding, he could scarcely sit through breakfast; but at last he made his escape, and breathed freely once more. What did he care that the groom remarked, "You be getting fonder of riding than you used to be, sir," or that Patty leaned from her bedroom window as he passed beneath, and sang, "Oh, who will o'er the downs with me"? She laughed and flung him a kiss from the tips of her fingers. "Dear little Patty," he said to himself, as he returned the salute. She was not little, and Alan was wont to admire her tall, slender figure, but little had grown into a term of endearment with him since he had known Rie.

Poor little Rie! The morning that saw Alan in this delirium of joyful anticipation, had found her a very doleful little maid. Stephen Gilpin had lived for so many years among his books and meditations, scarcely noting how the days passed, or who came and went, that Alan's frequent appearances at his little house, and long talks on many subjects—for Alan could talk *there*, so long as he had Rie to watch, and Rie to listen—these frequent visitations had wrought no wonder or surprise in the Vicar's mind. But that morning he had suddenly awoke to some glimmering of the state of things. "Alan Wyke said he should call this morning," he said. "I shall be at the church seeing after the mending of the roof. You must send him there if he wants me. I can't think what has taken the boy; he never used to hang about in this way. Rie, little woman, is it you or me he comes to see?"

"You, of course," she answered. "I always make the puddings when he is here."

But Stephen Gilpin had startled himself by the question he had asked, and her quiet answer did not entirely reassure him. His pale grey eyes scanned her face anxiously.

"Yes, yes," he said, "he was talking about Comte the other day; he thinks a good deal, that boy, but he doesn't read enough. Well, child, send him to me if he comes. Don't let him spoil the pudding."

And he put on a battered old hat which had seen much weather and service, and sauntered off towards the church; and Rie went up-stairs to make her bed and dust her room, as was her custom. It had much to bear, that unfortunate bed, that morning. Rie thumped and pommelled it, and banged the pillows until the feathers began to fly about, and then she sat down and cried.

"All kinds of people came about the house at home," she said, "and Grannie never asked me if they came to see me. Uncle Stephen is very kind and good, but he is absurd. He has never had a girl in the house before, I suppose. What a plague it must be to him!"

Then she flipped the duster about with redoubled energy, and made certain resolutions which relieved her spirits and sent her down-stairs singing and quite ready for the fray, as she told herself.

The result of these resolutions was that Alan was told, when he presented himself half-an-hour later, that "master was down at the church and could be found there, and Miss Rizpah was busy and couldn't speak to nobody."

"Tell her I won't keep her a minute," Alan bade the maid, but this assurance was met by the prompt—

"It ain't a bit of good your waiting ; she says as you're to go away."

"She didn't say that, Maggie."

"Well, she said as good as that—can't just remember the words ; certain 'tis she can't be bothered with you."

"Tell her I'll wait in the study."

"T' study's all upset ; can't have you there."

Here Alan decided the matter by opening the drawing-room door and walking in, saying—

"I'll find a book and wait till Miss Rae is disengaged."

The maid grumbled and disappeared, leaving the door ajar ; by which means the following dialogue reached the visitor's ears—

"You've let him in, Maggie ?"

"Nay, I didn't ; he just walked in."

"You never told him I was busy."

"That I did ; said you couldn't be bothered with him—that's plain English, surely."

"You should have told him where to find my uncle."

"So I did ; seems he didn't want the master."

"Nonsense, he wouldn't wait if he didn't. Go and tell him I haven't the least idea when uncle will be in."

"You'd better go yourself, Miss Rae. He'll not go for me."

Rizpah was ironing, and had just turned to put an iron back to heat before the grate, when this suggestion was made. With an impatient exclamation, "Perhaps I'd better," she ran down the narrow passage to the drawing-room door, still holding the iron in her hand. Doubtless she had quite forgotten it, for when Alan rose hastily and held out his hand—the blinds were down and the room in shadow—it was the iron, and not her soft, warm hand that he grasped.



"Oh, do take care! what are you doing?" she exclaimed. "See what it is to come upon me when I am busy. You have burned yourself."

"A very warm reception," he said. "But never mind, let me put the iron down for you. Why did you hurry? I could have waited until you were ready."

"But why should you wait? Uncle may be out till dinner-time, and it is no distance to the church. Go to him, and let me finish my ironing."

"I will wait till you are ready, and we will go and meet your uncle together."

"I shall not be ready all the morning," Rie was persisting, when the little maid came in to fetch the iron.

"Miss, I've not a thing to do, so I'll finish off those bits of handkerchiefs and collars for you."

Rizpah was beside herself.

"I prefer to do my own work, Maggie," she said.

"And so do I, miss. It was my work before ever you came nigh the place, and the master wasn't pleased with his collars last week. I'd set my heart on having them nice for him this time."

Alan laughed.

"The ground is slipping from under your feet," he said. "Maggie will have her way."

"Everybody has except me," Rie replied, rather dolefully. "Well, if you will go on towards the church, I will fetch my hat and come after you."

"I will wait for you," Alan replied. "I'm in no hurry," and again Rie felt that the fates were against her.

Ten minutes later they were walking along the road. The Vicar was not at the church, but somewhere along the road, the workmen said; he'd be back soon, and they sauntered about the churchyard waiting for him.

Suddenly a great silence fell on both of them, the men resting from their work looked on from a distance, and said, "There's something wrong between those two." Nor were they much mistaken. Alan was asking himself, in great trouble and bitterness of spirit, why he had been so hasty. Rie was half-choked with the flood of feeling which was almost too much for her self-control.

"Don't, don't," she had cried, when he told his tale—that oft-told tale which never grows old—of love and longing. "Oh, I wish you wouldn't say such things; I know you do not mean them. You hurt me so."

"Hurt you! not mean them! Rie, for what do you take me?"

"You cannot mean them," she went on passionately. "What do you know of me—what do I know of you, that you should talk of love?"

"I mean all I say," he replied, "and a great deal more. Rie, listen to me."

"Oh, but I can't; I am sure it is all a fancy. Say it is a fancy—a sudden thought, and that you will forget all about it. I know you will."

"If I know anything about myself I shall not forget it. How can I, when every day and all day long I think of you and no one else?"

"That is because you have nothing to do here. Oh, this idle life is horrid. But when you go back to London and your work, you will have other thoughts, and wonder what made you fancy yourself in love with me. I know you will."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Rie, let me tell you——"

"No, no, don't! You will forget it all when things

of more consequence come in your way and take up your thoughts."

"Nothing can be of more consequence," he answered gloomily. "Life has seemed an entirely different thing to me since I cared for you; and if you cared for me——"

"But I don't—I never thought of such a thing. I am not going to marry and settle down to an easy-going, comfortable life, with some one to take care of me and nothing to do. No; don't say any more about it. I should be miserable if I thought you really cared, but I am sure you don't. I don't believe you ever thought of saying this when you came out this morning."

It was true. He had left home with no such definite purpose; yet it was no mere fancy, and he knew it. So a silence had fallen upon them—not the usual thoughtful, dreamy silence to which Alan was prone, but the silence of strong emotion on the one side, and of sudden shyness on the other.

Rie was reflecting that though in her old home she had met more people in a day than Langdale saw in a month, yet no one had ever before spoken to her words of love. In fact, its tones and language were entirely unknown to her. Neither of her grandparents used terms of endearment, and the child had grown up without any of the caresses and tender words which childhood seems to crave. Her uncle was different. In his way he was often as loving and soft-hearted as a woman, but there were days when, lost in his own thoughts, he scarcely noticed her; and on such days Rie would wonder what good her presence there could do him. And yet the cry of that vehement little heart had always been, "Make use of me, my God!" The day, she told herself, might be put off, but sooner or later it would

surely come, when the offering that she longed to make, of herself, her time, her ease, and all her powers, would be accepted. But in the meanwhile she was vexed with Alan and vexed with herself that these words had passed between them. She had no doubt that she had acted rightly. To live as Lady Wyke did, as most country ladies did, would not be the realization of her life's dream. It might be right—no doubt it was right—to lay aside that dream to comfort a lonely old man, but to give up her plans for ever for the sake of a lover was quite another matter. "No, never," the resolute little woman was saying to herself; "he must get over it. And of course he will; it is all nonsense after all."

She was glad when this awkward companionship came to an end, and the Vicar joined them, perfectly unsuspecting of what had occurred. He had returned to the church, and was sitting near the gate, but rose as they approached.

"Too cold to sit," he said, and then he listened while Alan explained that he had come to say good-bye. He was going back to London next day, and should not take another holiday for three months at least.

"Rie here will envy you," her uncle said. "Work, work, is all her cry, and I can't satisfy her craving."

Alan glanced at the girl as he spoke. She had brightened up astonishingly in the last few seconds, there could be no doubt—she was glad that he was going. He heard little of what the Vicar said about the work that was going on; of the man who had broken several ribs a few days before, having fallen while engaged in similar work. He assented absently to all the remarks which seemed to require an answer, and did not notice the wondering look with which his senseless replies were received.

"And you won't come back to dinner? Well, that's too bad. Where's your horse? Jossy Braithwaite's got him, eh? Well, good-bye, good-bye; we shall miss you. Where's my stick, Rie? Oh, I left it by the vestry door."

She ran off to find it, and Alan followed her.

"I shall come back at Easter," he said in a low voice, "and I shall come and see you. Try and change your mind, Rie."

"I never do anything of the kind; but it will do just as well if you change yours," she replied, with averted face. "Good-bye."

"*Au revoir*," he said.

"Good-bye," she repeated, and ran to rejoin her uncle.

"Aunt Judy," said Patty some hours later, coming into the room where Miss Wyke was squeezing her belongings into a box far too small to receive them, and emphatically declaring that the things had grown in bulk since she came to the north, "Aunt Judy, Alan *does* mean to go with you to-morrow. He is packing his books and sorting out his music at this very minute, but he is decidedly sulky. What do you think has happened?"

"Nothing, child, nothing—what can have happened?"

"You don't think she may have said No?"

"I don't think anything about it. If you want to know, why don't you ask him?"

But Patty did not approve of this suggestion.

"You can do that when you have him to yourself in London, aunt. Oh, how dull we shall be!"

"Lady Wyke is talking of a change as soon as she is a little stronger. You will go with her, Patty?"

"Yes, she says so. Sir Andrew says he cannot afford

it, but she said, 'I am afraid it is absolutely necessary, Andrew,' and she walked across the room with such dignity as she said it, that he was struck dumb. Even Alan noticed it and chuckled."

"Stupid boy," said Miss Wyke. "Patty, if you chuckle, I'll strangle you."

"No fear, Aunt Judy; I am lost in wonder and admiration when she says in that impressive way, 'It is *absolutely necessary*.' The length of that syllable—*ab*—and the pathetic way in which she says it, make one positively shudder. He began abusing her dress again last night, and she said, 'It is *absolutely necessary* for me to wear the warmest things I have, whether you like it or not,' and he said nothing more about the dress. It was splendid, but I never feel inclined to laugh. It is so amazing to see Sir Andrew silenced that I feel half frightened."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### NOT FOR HIM.

"Love alone denies us rest,  
Crueller than sword or sea."—W. WATSON.

PATTY had asserted that her brother was decidedly sulky ; the groom who took Dandy from his master had remarked that he had never seen the young man look so like the old one before. Lady Wyke was more than ever tenderly solicitous for his health, and Sir Andrew had sarcastically observed that it was the end of the holidays, and Alan had never been over-fond of work ; but Alan himself, hearing none of these comments, was quite satisfied that he was bearing himself just as usual, and that no one had the least idea how much he was suffering. He had even forced himself to eat some dinner ; had sung Lady Wyke's favourite songs ; had made a list of Patty's commissions to be executed in London, and had squabbled a little with Sir Andrew. What more could be expected of him ? The only consolation he could find in the vast flood of trouble that overwhelmed him, was the thought that at least no one would now be able to say he was going the way of his father, since he could not imagine that that worthy individual had ever met with a reverse in love. It was poor solace, but Alan made the most of it, and in bitterness of spirit told himself that after all love made fools

of men, and that in spite of his parting words to Rie, it might be better to have done with all such thoughts, and find his life's interest in a hard hand-to-hand struggle with the vice and cruelty that are working such havoc in the lives of men. Other men had done this, why not he? He had enough of this world's goods for himself; he had no need to work for daily bread. Well, then, he could work for others; plunge into the midst of the *mêlée*, and perhaps come out more than conqueror! The words flashed through his mind; he scarcely knew whence they came, nor what he meant to conquer, but he had a vague notion of a self-love to be slain, and of countless demons abroad and at home who dared him to the fray. If love was not for him, this at least might remain; he set his teeth and clenched his hands, and longed to be away from all the quiet and silence of the mountains and the valleys, into the world beyond,—to lose himself among the throngs of men, their woes, and wants, and strugglings.

"A hundred years hence what will it signify? as Aunt Judy says," thought he to himself, as he rolled about on his bed, and wondered why he did not sleep. "What will it signify to me or to any one else? Sir Andrew has not added much to the happiness of the world by his triumphs, and who knows if marriage would be more successful with me?" And then he resolved to go to sleep, and put off thinking till to-morrow, but in spite of his resolution, he went on thinking, and forgot to go to sleep.

Miss Judith had no doubt her own share of perplexing thoughts during her journey to London; but she had made her moan, and had done with it. The world would hear no more of her grievances; neither did she intend that Alan should trouble society with his woes



if she could prevent it. Therefore when they were nearing their journey's end, it occurred to her that it might be as well to give him a gentle hint, "just to prevent the boy making a fool of himself," as she mentally expressed it.

"Look here, Alan," she said; "as those idiotic-looking people have taken themselves off, I wonder whether they live at Watford—they got out there; if so I'll take care I never settle at Watford; but as I was saying, as we're alone, I may as well say something while I think of it. Do shut that window and keep your head in; there are always railway-arches and things sticking out that knock people's heads off, and then there'd be no end of a fuss, and nobody to look after the luggage at Euston."

Alan laughed, and shutting the window said—

"And you would be saved the trouble of telling me how I am to behave to O'Flaherty."

"I am not going to tell you that; if you don't know, you can go. What I was going to say is just this; things have gone a bit contrary with me, and for aught I know, with you too. Well, we can't help that. But there's one thing we can help. Half the people I know will lose no time running round to see how Miss Wyke bears up under her trouble. Well, they'll see what they'll see, and I imagine it won't be much. But people know nothing about your woes, Alan, whatever they may be. Well, my advice to you is—I'm great at giving advice, but nobody ever takes it—my advice is, don't sit in sackcloth and ashes any longer than you can help; leave off pulling the ends of your moustache, it gives your mouth such a dejected droop; shake yourself, and go and see how many of your friends have fallen from greater heights than you, and bind up their broken arms

and legs for them, and for pity's sake let's hear nothing of broken hearts, not even in your songs; and that reminds me, you'd better get a few new songs, I'm sick to death of yours. And here, roll up my rug for me, and throw that silly book out of the window. What Patty meant by saying it would amuse me, I can't imagine."

"You've been reading it pretty hard, Aunt Judy. I have been admiring your patience."

"I *must* read in a train. I can't endure it without something to do; but as for that book, well, I feel the worse for it,—I do indeed."

And now began the struggle for which Alan had been bracing himself, for in spite of his parting words with Rie, he had bade her good-bye with the conviction that she meant what she had said; and being by nature singularly deficient in self-confidence and conceit, this conclusion seemed on mature consideration a perfectly natural one.

Why *should* she care for him? He could assign no reason, therefore of course she did not care for him; and this being so, he must make up his mind to live without her. It did not appear strange to Alan—good fortune had seldom come in his way. It seemed to him, that had he obtained his wish at this period of his life, he would have been as much surprised as pleased. All his life long it had fallen to his lot to want things he could not have, to be perpetually disappointed, to see brightness slipping from him, and to have to bear and forbear, to make the best of things. Dream after dream of better things had vanished, and so had this last—his best and fairest—and what remained?

The love of friends, he had many; the joy of bringing relief to suffering; the blessed solace of music; with

these, life need not be altogether gloomy ; and even if it were, Aunt Judy's doctrine was right,—no wailing and lamenting ; he would die hard. Die,—how she would laugh at the idea ! No ; he should not die—he would not die—why should he ? So long as the sun shone, so long as there remained a blue sky overhead, green grass beneath his feet, birds to sing, sweet airs to blow, it was good, it must be good to be alive. Ay, more, even if the birds did not sing, nor the sun shine, nor the glories of nature abound, so long as there remained a single interest in social life, a single stroke of work to be done, it must be good to be alive. Yet more, if, as Stephen Gilpin and others persisted, “life should live for evermore”—and Alan had of late been feeding on this hope, allowing it to take possession of his spirit, and to thaw the icy bonds that held it—if this hope should prevail, then most of all must it be good to be alive.

For with the hope of immortality came the aspiration to climb, to rise from high to higher. Work that seemed so poor might—nay, would—be perfected if there were no limit to man's being ; if the splendid purposes of the soul could be certain of space and time for accomplishment, then indeed it were worth while to labour. If friendships could last for ever and ever, then most surely was it worth while to make friends.

“Somebody,” Stephen Gilpin had once said in his quaint fashion, “was kind enough to renounce the devil for you, when you could not do it for yourself ; but you, with the perversity which you say belongs to your family,—and some people think to other families besides,—you appear to have had some acquaintance with him, since doubt of your own immortality is his special and favourite theory. Your own heart never suggested it,

Alan. Have done with the foul fiend. You believe in God, and God is Love."

"Yes, I believe in God," Alan had said.

"*Know* Him," was the reply.

Alan had scarcely understood whether the words were a question or a bit of advice. They seemed an echo of words familiar to him, but which in that connection flashed upon him with new meaning,—"*This is* Life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God." If this were possible, then indeed must it be good to be alive.

So, in spite of the desponding with which he had brought his visit to the north to a close, in spite of the conviction that the good things of this world—wedded love and the joys of home—were not for him, Alan had no inclination to have done with life. He did not even think it worth while to bestow much pity on himself, therefore it must be admitted he was by no means a model hero. Perhaps it may be doubted whether he had really known what it was to fall in love at all.

However that may be, he was conscious of the springing up of new-born ambitions, of a sturdier manhood, of a growing courage: these should help him to endure, and stand in the stead of love. He had friends in plenty with whom to spend his leisure time, and work and study became each day more engrossing.

Miss Judith, true to her resolve, had settled down with stoic calm to her life under its changed aspect.

"It doesn't really make any difference to me," was her invariable response to the inquiries of her friends, and she had a way of saying the same thing to herself; but to Alan she sometimes indulged in a few grim jokes, which no doubt were a relief to her feelings.

"The creature wants a latch-key, and Faith is perfectly miserable," was her first greeting to her nephew,

about a week after the happy pair had returned home.

"My old grievance," Alan replied. "Tell him I have never been allowed to have one ; it may reconcile him to his fate."

"Faith did tell him, but his reply is a sensible one, 'I am not your nephew.' I say, allow him a dozen, and he'll lose them all in a week."

"There's a hole in his pocket, you say?"

"Holes in all his pockets, but Faith can't find them."

"He has a huge correspondence. I pick up letters for him on the mat in the hall, on every chair and table in the dining-room, and they fill the letter-box all day long."

"Bills, my dear, bills. 'Tis a pleasure to settle them, and leave his mind free for his great work."

"Aunt Judy, you will have to interfere."

Miss Wyke smiled, one of her rare and beautiful smiles, as she replied—

"Not yet child ; not yet. Faith must have her dream first. When she wakes I shall be there."

"Are you sure, Aunt Judy ? Won't O'Flaherty worry you into your grave first?"

"Alan, what do you take me for ? O'Flaherty worry *me* !"

"His brogue does, aunt, and his property, and his cousins. Come, you can't deny it."

"He has a dear sweet little cousin that would suit Alan out and out. 'Faith, me dear, I'll be writing her soon. She's a thrifle older than he, but that's all as it should be, as you and I know.'"

"And what did 'Faith, me dear,' say?"

"Just what she always does. 'Your friends will always be welcome here.'"

"No reference to you, Aunt Judy?"

"Alan, if you please, when I require help to keep up my dignity I will let you know. If Faith wishes to have his Irish cousins, she is welcome; yes, and to clothe them too, if she likes, for they're certain to be in rags."

"You'll want my room when they come, Aunt Judy."

"You are frightened lest they should marry you against your will. Don't you think you'd better change your quarters at once? Faith knows a dear little niece of his, who is poverty-stricken, and would be glad of a nice husband. She's not altogether Irish, and might suit you better. I believe there is some choice mixture of American and German blood in her family."

"Thank you for the warning, Aunt Judy. So dear Aunt Faith has become a match-maker in her old age."

"Don't begin abusing Aunt Faith, Alan, or I'll turn you out. What makes some women match-makers? Tell me that. Nothing in the world but a notion that they can add to people's happiness—an awful blunder, maybe; but they mean it well, they mean it well."

"And O'Flaherty? What of his plans for settling me in life? Are they purely philanthropical?"

"Masculine match-making is a different kind of thing," Miss Wyke protested. "I fancy it starts from other motives than merely the idea of securing people's happiness. Women are apt to fancy they can live on love. Men take a more practical view of life. With them dinner is a necessity, as I have often observed."

Alan laughed. "I can well believe that the O'Flaherty cousins may look upon dinner as a precarious kind

of institution. I fancy O'Flaherty did once upon a time."

Miss Wyke shook her head. "I doubt it," she said. "Bill are facts—butchers' bills, tailors' bills, grocers' bills—no ; I think we may be easy about him."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"IT WAS PAST BEARING."

"Thou art so full of misery,  
Were it not better not to be?"—TENNYSON.

"WHEN you are passing that way, you should drop in and see him. Oh, don't begin that cry. No time—nobody has any time except the busy people. If you are as busy as you would have me believe, you'll have time at your disposal, and I'll bet anything you like you couldn't dispose of it better." So said Captain Fanshaw to Alan Wyke, as they sat together one day at lunch, and the person thus commended to Alan's attention was the Hon. Charles Fitzacre.

"I tell you, Fanshaw, I never liked the fellow,—as surly a bear as ever lived."

"Perhaps; but that's nothing to the point. He's ill, fearfully ill, and every one cuts his acquaintance; not a soul goes near him of all the crowds of people he used to know; and his mother, though she gives him house-room, scarcely troubles her head to ask how he is. I don't pretend to be specially soft-hearted, but I can't drop a fellow in that way, merely because he's ill; and, well—precious disagreeable, if you like."

"I can well believe it," Alan replied. "What's the matter with him?"



"Don't know ; something perfectly incurable, and perfectly unbearable, so he says."

"Always in pain ? I shouldn't have thought he'd care to see visitors."

"Look here, Wyke," said Captain Fanshaw, drawing nearer to him, "I'll tell you what it is, the poor beggar vows he won't bear it much longer."

"You mean he'll put an end to it," Alan said.

Captain Fanshaw nodded gloomily. "I don't wonder," he said. "I don't know that I wouldn't if I were he ; at the same time, there's a prejudice against that way out of life, and one dislikes the notion of it."

"Cowardly," said Alan.

Fanshaw shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

"Has he ever mentioned me ? I dare say he's forgotten all about me ?"

"He was talking of your singing yesterday. Go and see him, Alan ; there's a piano in his room ; you might wile away an hour or so for the poor devil, and do yourself no harm."

"Let him know you've told me to come, then," Alan said.

And so it was agreed, and thenceforward much of Alan's idle time was spent in Fitzacre's sick-room. If it did no good, it could at least do no harm, he reflected. Music that had charmed away many a dreary mood from Alan himself, might exorcise the evil spirit from the sick man, as in olden days from King Saul.

He did not find him so outrageously surly as he had expected ; but as the visits became less of a novelty, and they became more at home with one another, Alan not unfrequently found him sunk in such depths of utter despair that he appeared almost incapable of being roused.

"You'll see," said Fanshaw, as they left the house together one evening; "one of these days he'll blow his brains out, and what wonder?"

"I don't know," said Alan; "he doesn't seem to me the sort of fellow to do it; it wants some nerve to do even that. Get hold of his doctor, and tell him what you think, Fanshaw."

The next few days were busy ones with Alan, and Miss Judith had claimed his services in the evening; so a week had passed without any meeting with Fanshaw or Fitzacre, when he suddenly met the former in the street.

"Well," said Alan, "did you see Brodie?"

"Yes; last Tuesday."

"And what did he say?"

"Stuck to it there's no cure to be expected; but can't see any ground for my fears."

"Well!"

"You'll see I'm right. Are you going there to-night?"

"Perhaps. I don't know."

"Do if you can. I know he isn't gracious, but he likes it."

Alan was tired. Home and the cheery company of Miss Judith—yes, even the mild diversion of a game of chess with Mr. O'Flaherty, while Aunt Faith purred around them, seemed preferable to an hour spent in singing and playing to the morose invalid; but his better feeling prevailed, and he turned in the direction of Cavendish Square.

The front-door was open; the carriage was at the door, and Alan had to pause and hand the dowager into it, who was going to an evening party, before he entered the house.

The footman was talking to the postman as he took some letters from him, and Alan passed in and went up-stairs to Fitzacre's room without further ceremony. It was up two flights of stairs, and Alan went up slowly as to no very pleasant duty. His hand was on the door, just about to knock, when there was a sudden tumult within, a scramble, a rush as of a great dog bounding across the floor, knocking down something heavy on its way, and as it seemed at the same instant came the sharp report of fire-arms, rattling, ringing through the house, followed instantaneously by screams from below-stairs. Without a second's delay Alan was in the room, footsteps on the stairs warning him that the servants had heard and were rushing to the spot. "Too late," he thought; "why did I stop to help that heartless old woman into her carriage?"

It was a strange sight that met his eye as he entered the dimly-lighted, heavily-curtained room. Seated at the table, on which a small reading-lamp was placed, was Fitzacre. His head had dropped on his chest, his right arm hung loosely by his side, while with one paw on her master's breast, the other laid on his arm, stood a huge staghound, well known to Alan as Fitzacre's constant companion, the only creature in the world who loved him, as he often bitterly remarked. The creature was gazing into the face of her master with a look eloquent of anxiety and affection. The sick man's eyes were closed, his face was pallid and haggard. Alan's first thought, "Just too late," seemed only too true; but his next was one of hope. Fitzacre moved, and as the servants came crowding in, he raised his head and opened his eyes.

"What!" he said, with a ghastly attempt at a smile; "you were startled, were you? It was Belle that did it."

"Did what?" Alan asked; he was standing by Fitzacre's side, bending over him. "Belle!" he said. "How could she do such a thing?" And at that moment his foot struck against something; he stooped down and picked up a revolver which was lying by the sick man's chair.

Fitzacre saw the movement.

"Yes," he said; "I was examining that old thing, and Belle jumped up and jogged my elbow; it went off. The charge is, I suppose, somewhere in the wall."

Belle whined, a low piteous whine of explanation. Alan laid his hand caressingly on the dog's head.

"Good dog!" he said.

Fitzacre looked up; their eyes met.

"Dear me!" said the housekeeper, "the dog been playing with that horrid thing! Well, I always did say that dog was too big to be in a house. How it must have frightened you, sir, and you so ill! I hope you won't be the worse for it."

"You look bad," said Alan; "lie down, Fitzacre, and let somebody fetch some wine; he must be kept quiet," he added to the crowd of domestics—"and please send for the doctor. He looks very ill," he added, as he followed the housekeeper to the door; "send at once; I will stay till the doctor comes."

The servants departed, and the two were left alone. The sick man had followed Alan's suggestion, and lain down on the couch; but his face was still ghastly in its pallor, and his teeth chattered. Alan sat down beside him, and again they looked at each other. Fitzacre's was a sidelong glance, not his usual expression of sullen despair; it seemed to cry for mercy, and implore pity and help. The dog came and rubbed her head against his hand, licked it, and wagged her tail.

At last Alan spoke.

"I wish you'd tell me all about it," he said simply, and Fitzacre broke down and sobbed.

"It was past bearing, Wyke, it was indeed."

"You have borne so much," Alan said, "and have been too much alone, and at last you lost all self-control."

"Lost my senses, you think? No, you are out there. I am perfectly sane. Why don't you say what you really think of me?"

"Because I can't. It is utterly impossible to put into words how awfully sorry I am for you, Fitz."

Then they both relapsed into silence, broken at length by Fitzacre saying—

"Stay with me, to-night, Wyke, there's a good fellow."

Alan assented, and a long evening and longer night followed, during which he had time and abundant reason to indulge in much wondering over the mystery of pain, and grew more lenient in his judgment of the poor sufferer. An opiate secured some rest for Fitzacre; but more than once during the paroxysms of pain, before he settled off for the night, Alan shuddered to hear him say, "Ah, Belle, if it had not been for you, all this would have been over hours ago," and then he had spoken sharply and reproached himself afterwards. "You know nothing about the matter," the sick man had groaned, writhing in his torment; "for pity's sake, give me the stuff the doctor ordered, and let me try to sleep." And he had slept, while Alan rested in an arm-chair, and wondered what was to be done next, and watched the lines of weariness and suffering smoothed by the great healer Sleep, dreading his awakening as a sure return to the dread monotony of pain.

"He must not be left alone to brood over his sufferings," the doctor had said, and Alan communicated this intelligence to Captain Fanshaw when he appeared early the next morning.

"I'll find a proper attendant, and send him here; if you'll stay till he comes. Will you see the old Countess, and explain as much as you think necessary to her? Queer that none of the rest of the family come near the place."

"They are given to quarrelling like cats and dogs," his friend replied. "So, Alan, you stayed here all night; you *are* a good fellow and no mistake. Yes, go; I'll stay with him this morning. I think I'll write to his brother, and tell him he must look after him; you and I can't undertake the whole responsibility."

Alan agreed, and went away. In the evening, he reappeared so eager and full of energy that Fitzacre passed his hand over his brow as if his superabundant vigour was too overpowering for him. But Alan did not notice this movement.

"Fanshaw has gone, I suppose. How do you like your man? Do you know, I've been talking about you to our house surgeon at Guy's, and he wants to know who told you that your case was hopeless; says he's seen people as bad as you recover. He's a jolly fellow; I wish you knew him."

"I haven't seen a jolly fellow for ages. You're the nearest approach to the species that I have known for ever so long. Well, if you want to know, it was Hunter told me I couldn't get well, and Brodie, I believe, thinks the same, though he's a man of less talk. What does your fellow suggest?" Then they went off into the discussion of symptoms and remedies, and Fitzacre was visibly cheered by the conversation.

"You've been fooling him," observed Fanshaw, the next time he and Alan were alone together. "What's the use of telling him he is going to get well? That's the first thing you doctors learn, how to tell lies with a good grace."

"I never said he'd get well; the most I said was that he might. It seems to me you like to look on the worst side of things. Surely what has happened, or rather what very nearly happened, ought to have proved to you that we must give him hope, even if we see but the faintest shadow of it ourselves. With his horrid notion of no life beyond death, it seems quite simple to him to cut short his sufferings here. Had he arrived at Hamlet's 'in that sleep of death what dreams may come,' he would scarce be in such a hurry to fly to ills he knows not of."

Fanshaw stared.

"So," he said, "you are changing your tune; even death is to be troubled with dreams, is it? I wish you pleasant ones."

It was the old sneering tone, Fanshaw's most unpleasant mood, and Alan was about to answer hastily, but something checked him. "After all, what do I *know*?" he asked himself. His better self replied, "I know that I shall live for ever."

"Well," pursued the other, as he did not reply, "I'm quite agreeable to your doing your best to cheer the poor fellow, and if by telling a few lies you can encourage him to bear his agonies, and go decently to his death, why, I've no objection. But, if your theory has a leg to stand upon, that death *isn't* an end of all things, surely a man *should* know when he's going to die; that's to say, if there's any use trying to prepare for a state of being of which we can know

absolutely nothing. Oh, hang it all, I'm talking like a parson."

"A queer parson," Alan replied. "But as for Fitzacre, the only thing to be done just now is to give him hope. The thought of going on as he is now drives him crazy."

"Naturally he thinks any change must be for the better; but I tell you, Wyke, that if you can convince him, as you seem to have convinced yourself, that a man can't make an end of himself, he'll be in no such hurry to 'shuffle off this mortal coil,' as your friend Hamlet says. What! you are off,—well, good-bye."

Alan went away full of thought. "After all, what do I know?" he repeated. "Life,—what is it? Eternal life,—how can we be sure of it? Would such pain as that poor fellow's make *me* long to die? I doubt it, unless beyond the shadows that lie between I could see the life I crave; I want no endless sleep."



## CHAPTER XX.

### AN EXPENSIVE LUXURY.

"Sweet lady, you have given me life and living."—SHAKESPEARE.

"AND so you've settled your gloomy friend for the present ; found him a private room at Guy's, you say ; and now you can make holes all over him, and find out what's the matter. How delighted you and your brothers in the craft must be ! I hope you will be more successful than we have been in finding a dead rat that Mr. O'Flaherty is certain has buried itself under his study Faith's in hysterics about it ; hasn't had a thought for anything else all day."

"Where is it supposed to be ?"

"You'd better ask where it *isn't* supposed to be. We've been snuffing about like three cats all the morning, and the carpenters have taken up the floor, and all the dogs and cats in the neighbourhood have been fetched to give their opinion as to its whereabouts, and the end of it all is we're as much in the dark as ever."

"And is O'Flaherty risking his health by sitting in the study, Aunt Judy ? His death will be at your door."

"Don't be a fool, Alan ; there's no dead rat in the case. He doesn't like his study, prefers to sit in the dining-room, and I won't have him there. It's a deep-laid plot, but I see through it."

"And you feel equal to the occasion ; can you baffle him and Aunt Faith too ?"

"They're sitting in their bedroom to-day, for I upset their plans of securing the dining-room by having it cleaned. It shall be cleaned every day if necessary. If they persist in taking possession of the dining-room, I'll find a dead rat there."

"O'Flaherty keeps you all alive, Aunt Judy."

"And the servants too, Alan ; he's ringing the bells all day long."

"I should think it probable his property did not support many domestics. What is his objection to his study ? It's not a bad room at all."

"It is small, and has no view over the street."

"What does he want with a view while he's concocting his sermons ?"

Aunt Judy shook her head.

"Faith says he has no time for writing sermons ; but, Alan, let's forget the creature. Faith and he will be here presently, and we must treat him decently for her sake. Poor Faith ! 'Tis an expensive luxury, a husband. But you had a letter from Patty this morning. What news does she give you ? When are they going away ?"

Alan drew the letter from his pocket, and glancing through it handed it to his aunt to read.

"No ; read it aloud. Patty writes a better hand than most girls, but her letters are always untidy, and make me cross. Read it aloud, Alan."

The young man obeyed, but in this manner Miss Wyke missed a part of the letter which might have interested her. Alan had some motive of his own for not reading one sentence, but as we do not profess to understand what that motive could be, we will read it over his shoulder. "I saw Rizpah Rae last week," the

writer said. "I fear she and I will never be great friends ; she has such a fervid nature of her own, she cannot possibly care for poor little me. I never had any of her dreams and visions ; she is a kind of Joan of Arc, and such ordinary people as you and I will never understand her." Alan read that sentence again and again ; he had read it several times before that day ; he read it now with a kind of wistful regret. Perhaps Patty was right ; perhaps she wasn't. He wished he knew that ardent little woman better, and he also wished that in some way or other she would learn to know him as he did not believe she did.

"Aunt Judith," he said suddenly, "I don't believe that little niece of old Gilpin's will ever settle down in Langdale ; you know it's all very well in summer-time, but the winters there must be awful for a girl brought up in London."

"Why don't you call her by her name ?" said Miss Wyke, with that directness which seemed to say, "Don't try to impose on me ; I know all about you."

"Call her by her name ? Well, she's grown up now. I can't call her Rie as I used to do."

"She has another name besides Rie. But why are you so certain that she will not settle down with her uncle ? Brought up, or rather tumbled up as you have been, how can you imagine what a girl with Rie's sense and principles will compel herself to do ? Why, you and Patty have no principles at all ; you do what is right in your own eyes."

"Naturally, since, as you remark, we've not been brought up to know any better. But do you really mean to say that Miss Rae has been brought up to stifle all her natural inclinations ?—for I'm sure her natural inclinations will rebel against a lengthy stay in Langdale,

and you seem to feel confident that she will remain there."

"If she thinks it right to stay, she'll stay. I hope she'll have the good sense not to be unhappy there ; but why have you taken such a sudden interest in the child ? What is she to you ?"

This sudden swoop of Miss Wyke drove Alan to bay.

"What is she to me ? Well, really, Aunt Judy, though she's nothing to me but an old playfellow, you needn't pull a fellow up so short. I was thinking of old Gilpin, and naturally Miss Rae came into my mind. Have you seen her grandmother since we came back to town ?"

"Yes ; she whisked in for a minute some days ago. No doubt she's always busy ; but she might have found out what Faith was doing a few days sooner, and then I might have come to the rescue. It is of small use shutting the door after the steed is stolen ; but she says she never guessed things were so bad. She asked if I thought all was going well with Stephen Gilpin and Rie, and when I said the child was rather dull there, she merely said—' Ay, I dare say, but that can't be helped, she must put up with that '—and she will, Alan ; that child has twice the endurance of father and mother put together. She's like the grandmother, but gentler and more womanly. I like Susannah Rae, but everybody does not understand her. You call her the prophetess Deborah, you say. Well, I like her ; but she takes one's breath away sometimes ; as probably Deborah did when she dragged Barak out to fight against his will. They're a rough couple, Susannah and her husband, and they've brought that child up to work like a little fury. How they came to have such a noodle for a son, I never can imagine."

"I suppose their energy extinguished him?"

"Just so; snuffed him out. It was always a question whether he wasn't too lazy to live, and they made life such an alarmingly earnest thing, that he gave up. Sometimes I feared the same inclination in you, Alan."

"In me, Aunt Judy! you really do maul a fellow most unmercifully. Why should you say I'm too lazy to live?"

"I didn't, Alan; but here's an occasion for you to prove the opposite. Here comes the master of the house, as he delights to call himself; exert yourself to talk to him, and keep him off me."

This was never easy. Mr. O'Flaherty had an impression, which not even Miss Judith's plain speaking could dispel, that he was a favourite with the fair sex, and that his style of address was specially acceptable to them. Miss Judith was a singular person, as he frequently complained to his wife, and did not meet him as he loved to be met; but that, no doubt, "Faith, me dear, is out of regard for your feelings; wives are proverbially sensitive." But he was not to be dismayed; and if driven off, always returned to the attack with redoubled zeal. Therefore Miss Judith had said—"Keep him off me," and Alan, as in duty bound, fled to the rescue.

Mrs. O'Flaherty soon followed her husband, the same soft, timid, fluttering lady as of old. Marriage had added nothing to her self-confidence; it had only brought an added sense of her own shortcomings, inasmuch as there was now another opinion to be consulted and deferred to, another person to treat her as a silly, incapable child, and that person by no means so considerate of her feelings as her sister had invariably been.

The grievance Miss Wyke had referred to was still

rankling in her mind, and she settled herself in her accustomed corner with a faint show of offended dignity. Her husband might be graciously forgiving, she knew *he* would put up with any insult or neglect; but for that very reason, she could not forget it.

"Judith is an old maid, and has no idea how sensitive men are," she said to herself, "but she might feel for *me*." So while her husband was replying with cold monosyllables to Alan's attempts to draw him into conversation, Miss Judith's amiable endeavours to amuse her sister met with even less response. The ghost of the dead rat threw a gloom over the whole party. Public events seldom had much interest for the curate, whose mind was so peculiarly constituted that it seldom seemed to dwell long on any subject. Had he looked at the papers?

"Oh, yes; a friend of his was married; but he could not remember who it was. He half thought somebody he knew was dead; but he wasn't sure. There was a very amusing thing in the agony column; but really it had quite passed from his memory—most laughable it was if he could only remember it. Mr. Gladstone had said a very clever thing in the House; but he couldn't understand it. What was it about, Faith, me dear?"

And Mrs. O'Flaherty, whose attention was divided between her sister and her husband, timidly suggested—"Rats, love."

"No, no; if it had been rats we'd not have forgotten it; would we, Faith, me dear?" her spouse replied with a hoarse laugh which Alan particularly detested, and which always brought Miss Judith into action.

"I am glad to find you can laugh over your trouble. This morning you were quite in despair, which to me was perplexing, since our near neighbourhood to the river

makes it extremely probable that every room in the house may be infested with vermin. We have said so before now,—haven't we Alan?"

Alan assented, adding—

"Now he came to think of it, he had once noticed a fetid odour in the dining-room."

Mrs. O'Flaherty sighed, softly; Mr. O'Flaherty became silent, and coughed in an embarrassed manner.

When Alan was alone in his room that night, his mind reverted to Miss Judith's severe remark, which had stung him more than her words were wont to do; and he asked himself more than once what had provoked her to such a point? To accuse him of being too idle to endure the burden of life was surely to add insult to injury; since she, better than any one else, knew, and had always known, how he hated the thought of death, and clung to the hope of life. She knows—then what does she mean?

Was she impatient with him because his progress on the road to belief and hope was so slow? Perhaps. A few days before she had broken out at him.

"Yes, yes, Alan; but go on, go on"—when by some few words he had let fall hints of the thoughts that were growing up in his mind. "Go on; can't you get further than the guesses of the heathen, and the wise reasoning of Egyptians and Greeks? Why do you tie a bandage round your eyes and go groping about in the dark, feeling after Him, if *haply* you may find Him?"

He remembered all this now, and concluded that this was the explanation of her severe attack. Too idle, too indifferent to find for himself the life for which he longed. Was it so? And as he asked the question, telling himself that he could not jump to a conclusion as women do, he fell asleep.

He had not slept long when he woke suddenly, and with a start,—then he wondered what had roused him, and instead of going off to sleep again, he began asking himself if there was not something amiss. The atmosphere of the room was heavy and thick. Was it smoke, or London fog? Then he took a sudden resolution, sprang out of bed, and flung open the door. Here there could be no mistake. Smoke filled the passage—coming as it appeared to him from the room opposite to his, which was Mr. O’Flaherty’s dressing-room. In a few moments other doors were thrown open, the servants peeped over the banisters above, Miss Judith stood in wondrous *déshabillé* on the stairs below, while a plaintive voice from Mrs. O’Flaherty’s bed-room complained that the dressing-room fire was smoking horribly. At this sound Miss Judith made a sudden rush up-stairs, and darting into her sister’s room, came out in a few minutes dragging Miss Faith, limp, crying, and only half awake, and piteously entreating, “Don’t, Judith,—my slippers—where are my slippers? Oh, you are so rough! I shall catch my death of cold.” But her sister paid no attention, until having shut the poor lady up in the drawing-room, she returned to the scene of action, where Alan, who had scrambled into some clothes, was trying to investigate the extent of the mischief. He had just pulled Mr. O’Flaherty, half choked and stupefied, from the smoke-filled room, and was calling to the servants to dress and come down, when Miss Judith reappeared.

“There’s somebody ringing at the bell fit to pull it down,” she said. “What can they want? What’s this man doing here sitting on the stairs? Get up,” she added, bestowing something like a cuff on the half-conscious curate. “Get up, and go down to your wife,



Alan, why can't you open that door and see what's on fire?"

"He's upset a lamp or something; everything's on fire; go down, Aunt Judy, you'll be choked."

"Choked, nonsense!" But she was forced by a violent puff of smoke to beat a rapid retreat, and in a few minutes more the flames burst forth.

"Alan, Alan; where is he?" moaned Mrs. O'Flaherty from the bottom of the stairs. "Oh, Alan, do get me my clothes; do just find me my dressing-case. Alan tell him to come down at once, and not risk his life trying to save anything at all. Alan, Alan!"—but Alan seemed deaf.

"It's most extraordinary," complained the good lady, retreating into the depths of a great arm-chair, and covering herself with sofa blankets, "why Alan can't come or pay any attention. And my poor dear, he will sacrifice his precious life, hunting for my jewel-case, just because I was foolish enough to mention it; and what are jewels to me if I lose him! Oh, Judith, here you are! What's to be done? and what are all these policemen doing? Oh, don't let them come in here; don't, don't!"

"The people opposite will take us in, Faith; lift her up and carry her," she added to a burly policeman; "no time for dawdling." So the poor, frightened lady was carried off, struggling and screaming, and invoking the aid of her poor darling.

Miss Judith followed to reassure her by the declaration that Mr. O'Flaherty was lying about somewhere on the stairs, and would probably be picked up by somebody.

"As to Alan, I don't know," the good lady added; "he seemed rather bent upon getting stifled, running in

and out of most stuffy places ; but I suppose he knows his own business best. Yes, Faith, it's your blundering Irishman that has done the mischief. What was he doing in his dressing-room between twelve and one, knocking over lamps, and getting into mischief ? ”

## CHAPTER XXI.

### NOT DARK.

"They two went closer down  
To the river-side."—B. M.

IN spite of the reiterated declarations of Mrs. O'Flaherty that her husband was sure to be burnt, choked, or otherwise grievously damaged in an attempt to save some of her property, that worthy personage was not long in presenting himself at the house where his wife had taken refuge, in as creditable a state of preservation as could be expected of any one who, as his sister-in-law explained, had been lying about on the stairs and run over by firemen and policemen for the last half-hour.

Strange to say, he had not succeeded in rescuing his wife's jewel-case or any of her clothes. What on earth he had been doing, Miss Judith declared she was quite unable to imagine, and Mr. O'Flaherty himself was equally unable to explain. He did not know where Alan was, or what he was doing, but was strongly of opinion that if he had been killed, he would have been sure to let them know; in which sentiment Mrs. O'Flaherty agreed, while Miss Judith said—

"Killed! Nonsense!—why should he be killed?" and thereupon skipped across the street to see if there was any ground for such a supposition.

The fire had been checked before it had attacked the lower part of the house, and Miss Wyke had the satisfaction of finding her nephew safe and sound, soaked with water and begrimed with smoke and soot.

"And so evidently enjoying himself that I could have sworn he'd set the house on fire himself for the fun of putting it out, if it hadn't been perfectly certain it was your blessed husband that did it, Faith," said Miss Judith. "Well, we shall have to go into lodgings, and he'll have to live on burnt mutton-chops, that's one comfort, and wholesome penance, seeing it's Lent."

Into lodgings accordingly they went; but Alan had other views for himself than to accompany them.

"I don't think I'll come to Kensington with you, Aunt Judy," said the young man; "there's a spare room in the house where Falconer lodges, I'll go there."

"Why, I thought you said he was dying?"

"Just so, and can't afford a nurse; it will be good practice for me looking after him a bit."

"Spending all your spare time with John Rae poking about filthy courts in Southwark, and your evenings with a dying man at home; this is living in the Valley of the Shadow indeed, Alan. I doubt your wisdom."

"Do you think I shall go melancholy mad? Not a bit of it, aunt; there's nothing of that sort of thing about Falconer."

"Well, well, get along with you; but come and see us sometimes," and Alan promised.

Had Miss Wyke known into what wretchedly poor lodgings her nephew was going, she might have made other objections; but yet no, I think not,—she was a brave woman, and Alan's determination had pleased her, though she would not say so.

Falconer was greatly moved when he heard his young friend's proposal.

"You know I'm out nearly all day, and read a good deal in the evenings; but if you'll let me share your sitting-room and fire in the evenings, it will be much more lively than sitting by myself," Alan had said. "And if you'll let me cater for you, I believe I can bring that landlady of yours into better order; you've let her have her own way too much, Falconer," and the sick man smiled.

"I understand you," he said.

"He's an awful swell, never did see such a fuss—clean plates for everything, wine-glasses and table-napkins, and the potatoes boiled and fried in a dozen ways, and the broth mustn't have a scrap of grease to it, and the toast not to be tough, and the tea,—oh my goodness! there's no pleasing of him. But he pays well, and he's good-tempered, and so what's it matter?"

This was the verdict of the slatternly landlady, and the explanation of the change which Falconer experienced in his hitherto dismal lodgings.

He had always been cheerful—resolutely, unflinchingly cheerful—even in his darkest days; now he became positively mirthful, so that the few friends that dropped in to see him from time to time wondered at him, and congratulated him on his improved health, saying his complaint must have taken a sudden turn, and he would cheat the doctors yet; but he knew better, and Alan too.

"I wonder if my fussiness worries you," the latter observed one evening, as he carefully took some floating fat from a cup of beef-tea with a piece of clean blotting-paper. "I couldn't swallow that myself, and I always fancy you couldn't; but perhaps you'd rather be let alone."

"You know better, Alan."

"That's just what I don't. I believe I plagued you last night by talking when you were tired; you are used to quiet, and probably prefer it, but you're too polite to say so."

"Used to quiet?—yes;—prefer it?—no. I was blessing that man that set your house on fire with all my soul last night. I hope they'll be some time building it up again."

"Why, that's no matter. I'm going to stay here until—well, as long as you want me."

"Until I die. Thank you." The words came quietly and naturally. Then Falconer continued, looking straight at Alan as he stood before the fire gazing thoughtfully into its red depths—"If you don't object, I would rather we made no fuss or mystery about my death. If I and you were separating, one for India, the other for America, we shouldn't avoid alluding to it, or call our journeys by out-of-the-way names. It is just the same with death. I am going away, you are to remain,—that's all."

Alan was silent for some minutes, struggling with some strong emotion; at last he said—

"If you really wish it, Falconer, I will talk of it as you do; but try as I may—and I cannot pretend in this matter—I cannot look upon death as anything but horrible, hateful, shocking."

"But why, Alan?"

"I hardly know. I suppose because of the uncertainty attending it. What if all our hopes and beliefs are disappointed, and when the curtain falls here, there is nothing on the other side of it?—that would be death indeed."

"But He hath abolished death," Falconer replied

hastily, "and hath brought life and immortality to light."

"Yes," said Alan, faintly and absently; "I know what you mean, and I almost believe it, but still—it is a leap in the dark."

"You say that," said his friend, "merely because the world beyond is to us an unknown region, of which we can form no idea, and the thought of the plunge is overpowering to you; while the reflection that we must leave all familiar objects, all our present methods of thought and reasoning, the books we love, the land we cherish, the many questions so intensely interesting to us, for—we know not what,—this is the idea that overwhelms you, isn't it?"

"Something like it."

"Yes, yes; I know. Haven't I gone over it all again and again, wondering how this question and that will look from the standpoint of the other world; and whether the new powers, the new knowledge which belongs to that other life, will not at first seem altogether too startling; whether the first thousand years will not be spent in astonishment? But ill-health has wearied me of many things, Wyke, and no doubt it is easier for me to make up my mind to go than for you, so strong and well, just beginning your life."

"I am not peculiar. Every one feels as I do," said Alan doggedly. "Some put a better face on it than others; you have brought yourself to think and speak in this way; it is not natural."

"Isn't it?" said Falconer, with a faint smile. "Well, we won't quarrel about that. Perhaps I haven't had quite an ordinary kind of life, which may account for my being a trifle eccentric."

"You have evidently thought a good deal about this

question ; most people seem to avoid it. I suppose it has been forced upon your attention whether you would or no ?”

“Yes, yes ; I have had plenty of reason to think about it, and plenty of time to wonder and speculate. When one after another my brothers and sisters went from me, how could I help wondering where they were, and how employed ? Don’t imagine I have any light on that subject. I am no spiritualist, and have never had the faintest notion that any of their spirits hold communion with mine—much as I have longed for it. But I know that they are themselves still, not cut-and-dried saints of one pattern, but their own individual selves ; and what I believe of them, I hope for myself.”

“You hope to find yourself, with your own peculiarities, talents, and ways of thinking, newborn and vigorous in the life beyond ?” Alan suggested. “Your very self unchanged ?”

“My very self indeed, but without my sins.”

“And these theories of yours reconcile you to the thought of the leap in the dark. I like your notions, Falconer, better than most I have heard. People talk sometimes of the other life as if the gloom of the death-hour would invade the world beyond ; as if an eternity of gravity and solemnity, such as is almost intolerable here, was to be the portion of the blest.”

“I know,” said Falconer, laughing softly. “How irate such people made my sister, my last sister, Wyke ! The brightest, merriest little soul that ever lived. Sometimes in the evening I sit and listen, until I fancy that the echoes of her ringing laugh seem still to linger in this room, or come from the other world,—I care not which. She solemn and grave—impossible ! But as for what you call the leap in the dark, Alan, I deny that it



is in the dark. Sometimes I recall a journey I took when quite a small boy from Southampton to Havre. The steamer started late at night—ten or twelve o'clock, I think it was—a very dark night, and there were but few lights about. It was my very first experience of the kind, and we stumbled along the quay, my eldest brother and I, among luggage and horses and carriages to the gangway. For a moment I stood alone in the darkness and confusion, then a hand was stretched out to me, and I was half led, half carried on board, among the lights, safe and happy. I knew the grasp of the hand, and in the light I saw my brother's face. If you are not here when I go, Alan, be easy, it will not be too dark."

"I should be of no use if it was," Alan replied sadly. "Like me, you loathe Death, but you do not fear it—as I do."

"Thou madest Death : and lo ! Thy Foot  
Is on the skull which Thou hast made,"

replied Falconer. "It is a hideous but a conquered thing."

"Conquered? No; since most people live in dread of it."

"Why should they? Even the light of reason has helped many to shake off that fear; and what is the meaning of the Cross which one sees on every church?"

'O Death of Christ, the death of death to me!'

"You are talking too much," said Alan, suddenly. "Now, you are perfectly worn out. Lie back, and go to sleep. I shall go out and leave you, and then you'll have no temptation to talk. By the bye, it is Good Friday,—how is it you never told me to go to church?"

"There'll be a service in the Abbey this evening; go there."

"Or to St. Paul's. I like the mass of people one sees

there, and the hum of the many voices." And towards St. Paul's he turned his steps.

The hum of many voices, the mingling with that great multitude of worshippers, the glorious surroundings in that vast temple—yes, Alan loved them, had always loved them, but that night his spirit was crying out for something more. "I believe: help Thou mine unbelief."

He had walked to the cathedral, he had entered it, and found himself a quiet corner, such as he liked, and there he sat waiting, with the words of a strangely pathetic air ringing in his head—

"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!  
Oh, that I knew!"

He had been singing it that afternoon to Falconer, singing it with all his soul; but softly, as Falconer liked it best. It had soothed the sick man in an hour of terrible weariness and breathlessness, and Alan had gone on singing other things, but that air had stayed with him. It was the cry of his soul. The words kept on coming back and repeating themselves during the long waiting time before the service, and mingled with all the music, prayers, and hymns. Many had spoken of Him, and he had listened, but something was still wanting.

"Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

What was it? What voice spoke those words which in the eagerly attentive ear of his spirit said reproachfully—"Have I been so long time with you, and yet have ye not known Me? Here then for certain may you find Me: in the Sacrifice of the Redeemer, in His agony and bloody sweat, in His Cross and Passion, behold the measure of My love for thee."

Alan did not seem to have heard very much of the

sermon that Good Friday evening ; even less than usual, his friend thought. He was quiet, and Falconer feared that their talk that afternoon had saddened him, and accordingly exerted himself to be lively and amusing. He did not understand, though he saw afterwards that something had happened ; that the great problems of Life and Death, of this world and the next, had appeared to his friend in a new light, seen under the shadow of the Cross of Christ.

That evening Falconer went early to bed, and the next morning showed no inclination to get up.

"I'll wait till you come back, and then get up for an hour or two in the evening. Give me some books, and I shall be all right."

And this was the order of things from that day forward till the end—no, that was not the word they used—Falconer objected to it, but—till the two friends parted.

"It will not be dark," he had said cheerfully, and he had spoken truly. It was the Sunday after Easter that Alan, going into his room—he would have no night-watching—in the morning found him sitting up in bed, much oppressed for want of breath.

"Perhaps it will be to-day," he said cheerfully, "but not just yet. Don't stay at home for me, Alan ; go out when you've had your breakfast."

And Alan made no reply, for he never disputed these little matters with his friend ; nevertheless, he did not go out, but stayed in the other room for a while.

"You forget how much alone I've been," Falconer remarked, when he next showed himself. "You're half afraid to leave me to-day, and until you came I always expected I should die alone ; and I'm quite used to the idea."

"Would you rather?" Alan asked in a choked voice. His friend had grown dear to him in the days they had spent together, and he was counting the hours that might yet remain of that pleasant intercourse.

Falconer smiled and shook his head.

"Stay with me when you feel inclined, but don't fancy I'm very bad and want looking after; all I want I shall soon have."

"And that is?" said Alan.

"More life, more life, everlasting life in His Presence; I can't talk, Alan."

"No, don't; shall I read to you?"

"Yes; or, better still, go into the other room, and play and sing softly, just as you know how. Alan, you have been good to me, but I am not going to thank you; one day I shall hear it said, 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least,' and I shall look at you."

And Alan played and sang softly for a long time, until the afternoon was wearing away, pausing every now and then to listen to the laboured breathing in the other room; then, when all seemed quiet, he stole gently back to the bedside.

Falconer was lying as if half asleep; the grey hue of parting life was settling on his face, the breathing was faint and slow.

"Not yet," he said as he opened his eyes, and the dry lips parted in a smile; "but He is there, and it is not dark. He comes to meet me. I go to Him."

And Alan, bending over him, added in words Falconer had often used—

"Love of Christ, receive me  
When all shadows part :  
Face to face I see Thee,  
Know Thee as Thou art."

"Yes, face to face—receive me," the dying man murmured ; and stretching out both hands as if in welcome, he passed away.

And Alan lingered beside the bed, watching the features settling down into their last calm and beautiful repose, and then went back to the other room, sat down mechanically on the music-stool again, and covered his face with his hands. It was over. Ten minutes before he had been singing to his friend. His friend was there in the next room, had spoken to him, had thought and felt as mortal men think and feel—now he was away. Where ?

Thus he sat without moving until the evening closed in ; the landlady's heavy step was heard coming up the stairs to bring tea, and light the gas. Then he roused himself to look as usual, and speak to her, and give some necessary directions. Her exclamations and expressions of regret and sympathy jarred upon him, but he heard them quietly, though he rejected the tea, when the thought occurred to him that the second cup which he was pouring out as usual was not needed. He was glad when she went away again and left him alone, and before long he grew restless, and went back to the silent room, as he told himself, to see that all had been properly done there ; but in reality to gaze and gaze and say—"He is not here, but far away." But then the lips seemed to smile, almost to move, and again he said—"No, not far away—lingering near perhaps—looking back perhaps—watching me, maybe. Ah, it is all *maybe* and *perhaps*. Only one thing I know,—I believe in the Life everlasting."

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE NEXT THING TO BE DONE.

"He is not here, but far away.  
The noise of life begins again."—TENNYSON.

MISS JUDITH was sitting in the pleasant rooms she had secured for herself overlooking Kensington Gardens a few days after the events recorded in the last chapter, enjoying the bright spring sunshine, the budding trees and gay scene before her, and enjoying also her little holiday from the society of Mr. O'Flaherty, who had gone with his wife for a much-needed holiday to the Isle of Wight, to recruit after the shock and alarm of the fire. How much she enjoyed that little rest, Miss Judith never admitted even to herself.

"One gets through such a quantity of arrears of work and correspondence when one is quite alone," she said. "Yes, I enjoy being alone once in a way ;" and her friends put various constructions on those words, for the most part not very complimentary to Mr. O'Flaherty.

But to Alan, for Miss Judith had dispatched one of her peremptory letters as soon as she had heard from him that his friend no longer needed his attendance, she had spoken more openly. "Come to me at once, I want you ; that Irish body has taken himself off, and we can be comfortable together ;" and her nephew had gone to

her as soon as the quiet little funeral was over, and in her strange way Miss Judith cheered him as nobody, not even Patty, could have done under the circumstances.

She asked but few questions, but to every word Alan let fall she gave that quiet, absorbed attention which is so pleasant when the heart is letting out some of its hidden thoughts and feelings; and Alan, who was used to her ways, understood the meaning of the quiet "Go on" with which she listened to all he had to tell. Probably he did not know, and would have been much astonished had he found out how much of his own history he was revealing as he related the details of that month with his friend. She was not slow in divining some of the thoughts which were coming to the front as he spoke of the funeral and the grave. He had tried to find the graves of Falconer's relations, naturally supposing he would prefer to be laid beside them, but, "I failed. What does it matter?" he asked, as if talking to himself; "the body is not the man; the actual body cannot rise again, so what does it matter?"

"Perhaps not," she said.

"Will the body rise?" he asked again, more as if speaking his thoughts aloud.

"The acorn becomes an oak; a little bulb a lovely snowdrop; the tiny seed the bright everlasting."

"I don't care much about it," he said; "the body is not the man."

"Yet it has happened once: it will happen again. In a human body Christ ascended to the heavens."

"Some people say," he answered, "that those appearances mentioned in the Gospel story were visions or spiritual appearances."

"Five hundred witnesses told a different tale," Miss Judith answered. "Was it for no purpose that He said,

'Handle Me and see'? Is it no help to our belief that all His disciples expected nothing of the kind, and were one by one convinced? Few events in history have been better attested than this. At least so wise men say, Alan."

"Wise men?" he asked doubtfully.

"Ay, ay," she replied emphatically; "for nearly two thousand years wise men have thought and reasoned and been convinced. How many millions of dead bodies besides your friend's have been received with those holy words, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life,' as they were brought to be laid in the grave? Did you not think of that yesterday?"

He made no reply. She kept her eyes away from his and went on quietly—

"Alan, one or two words more."

"As many as you will, Aunt Judy."

"No, the fewer the better. But I was going to say, what is our Holy Day, by hallowing which week by week we keep religion alive within us, or attempt to do so? It is not the day of His death, but the day of His resurrection. And again, had His ignominious death, His burial in a borrowed grave, been the last we know of Him—could we, think you, bear to keep a sacred feast in remembrance of that death? No indeed, it would be too exquisitely painful, too unspeakably horrible. No, *He* has risen, and therefore we too shall rise. No matter how."

Alan did not speak for some minutes. When he did it was to say—

"When I saw Falconer die, it seemed to me that he *had* risen to a higher life: that was enough."

"Go on, Alan; that will not content you long."

"Won't it?" he said. "I dare say you are right." And



then he went away, and left her thinking over what had passed. He did not return to the subject, and Miss Judith never tormented people with her own opinions unless they were sought for. A few days after, both her thoughts and those of Alan were taken up with another matter, arising out of a visit from Mrs. Rae, erect and stern as usual, but evidently much perturbed in her mind.

She found Miss Judith sitting at her sunny window, with a heap of knitting on her lap, and much thought on her brow. She had a habit of supplying all the old women of her acquaintance with knitted petticoats, and all the young ones with good advice, therefore her fingers were always busy, and her face not unseldom marked by lines of much thought and consideration.

Mrs. Rae sat herself down opposite to her, with her back—and this was no accident—turned towards the bright prospect, one hand grasping her umbrella, the other holding the strings of a useful-looking bag. "Looks as if she were going out collecting bones and grease," was Miss Judith's mental comment as she glanced at the bag. "Take a more comfortable chair, Susannah, and sit where you can see the sunshine and green things;" but Mrs. Rae paid no attention to the invitation, and went on setting forth the object of her visit.

"Dare say you know why I've come?"

"Not a notion. Anything amiss?"

"Mr. Rae's been out of sorts for months past. I've told you that before."

"Been to see a doctor? Not much use; but still it's a ceremony we most of us go through a few times in our lives."

"He went a month ago. Your nephew made him. The man said—wanted rest, nothing else."

"Of course; I could have told that—so could you, Susannah. He must have been a wise man, that doctor; but he'll be wiser still if he makes Mr. Rae rest, if I know anything about the matter."

"I made him give up a cottage-lecture."

"You did, Susannah? How many has he?"

"Four others, and four services on Sundays, and three in the week, and classes and visiting without end; and the Inspector's been plaguing about more room in the school. That's the last straw, Judith."

"Take him away, Susannah, to the North Pole, or the Rocky Mountains—away from all inspectors, schools, and classes."

Mrs. Rae drummed on the floor with her umbrella, fidgeted with the strings of her bag. "Can't leave the curate to do all the work," she said at last.

"Is that all?" said Miss Judith. "Will John Rae go if you can settle the work?"

"He says being summer-time some work could be dropped; but there's more than one man could do. Judith Wyke, let me finish my story, and then answer one question."

Miss Judith nodded, and Mrs. Rae proceeded—

"Your nephew has been mixed up in this matter," she said. "He came to me after John had been to the doctor, and told me plainly that if he didn't rest he'd break down altogether—have a stroke, or bring on softening of the brain, or something of that kind. Now, Judith, that's a prospect I can't face, and when Alan urged my husband to let him find the money to pay a *locum tenens*, I did my best to bring John to consent. Was I wrong, Judith?"

"Wrong?—no, of course not! Then it's settled. When and where do you go?"

"It's not settled. John half gave in, then repented, and wants to know what Alan's means are—wonders if it's an allowance from his father. I said you'd know."

"It's his own money, from his mother—plenty for a young man. Tell John Rae to take it. Young men only waste their money; it is a charity to use it for them. Then you're going to the North Pole?"

"John hasn't had a holiday for ten years, and doesn't seem to be able to give his mind to it. One minute he says he'll go to Margate or Ramsgate, and the next that he'll stay at home. Never saw him so undecided in my life."

"He's ill," said Miss Judith emphatically. John Rae undecided! No wonder Alan was frightened. "Go home and pack up, Susannah. I'll tell Alan to see to it, and get him off."

And Mrs. Rae stood up straight and alert, put the strings of her bag over her arm, clutched her umbrella, and went home, resolved to use strong measures to bring her husband to decision.

And Alan, coming in late that evening—he had again taken up his quarters with his aunt—found Miss Wyke very energetic, and full of the troubles of her friends the Raes. She was at heart entirely satisfied with her nephew's proceedings; but "he shall not learn conceit from me," she vowed, and accordingly Alan heard the whole story of Mr. Rae's illness from her lips without any allusion to his own action in the matter. "They've decided to go away, and get somebody to do his work," she said. "Alan, you've been there a good deal lately, why didn't you find out how ill he was, and make him go off before this?"

"He's hard to move," Alan replied ; "I've been trying to persuade him for the last month. There has been much talk of dying at his post. I've a theory that living is to be preferred to dying, you know, aunt ; and when dying may mean lying half dead for seven years or more, I can't see why any one should hesitate to try and escape such a doom."

"Well, he's going now, and what you've got to do is to settle things for him, and see him off."

"Have they found a man to take charge of the parish ?"

"I don't know. Get him off, and find the man afterwards. The world won't come to an end if some of his work stops for a day or two. He's got a curate—a tame sort of animal—but well trained. Come, stir yourself, Alan, and get the man off to-morrow."

"To-morrow!—no, aunt, he will not go till Monday, he has said so positively. Perhaps to-morrow they'll hear of some one to take his work, and then he'll go off easy. There was some talk of the curate's father coming."

"Where is he to go ?"

"I suggested Scotland ; he really doesn't care, so I think it will be somewhere in the north. Perhaps they'll come home by the Lakes, and go and stay with old Gilpin on their way south."

"Not a bad idea. Susannah Rae did not mention little Rie. I wonder if the child is settling down ?"

To this Alan made no reply, and Miss Judith, darting an inquiring look at him over the top of her glasses, could not read his face. Had he not heard her ? Was Rie nothing to him ? Miss Judith decided that after all Patty must have been dreaming—Alan had never thought of her little favourite, Rie had never thought of him—girls are so fond of such imaginings. After all

there was nothing in it. Alan's face had grown more grave of late ; but the old weary, discontented look had vanished, the haunted, watching-for-something-round-the-corner expression, as Miss Judith called it, was gone. It was a handsome face now, with a light in the eye, and lines of firm resolve above the mouth which were indicative of an enjoyment of life without let or hindrance. But it was a mouth which said plainly enough, "I can keep my own secrets," and Miss Judith read its assurance, and respected it.

"If I could get hold of Rie, there would be no difficulty in finding out how matters stand with her," she said to herself. "The child is open as the day—all her thoughts, wishes, and plans come bubbling forth like a mountain torrent. But there, why should I wish to know? No doubt it was Patty's fancy. Poor little Patty! she has nothing to do but dream and plot and imagine. And she thinks she knows Alan too, and perhaps she does ; but Rie is not the girl I take her for if she will marry Alan Wyke."

And Miss Judith sat looking at Alan and thinking of Rie. Poor little Rie! sitting at that moment on her bed-side, reading over for the twentieth time that day one of her grandmother's brief epistles, and longing for her old room in the dark old vicarage-house, and the London cries, and the roar of her native city. "What does Grannie mean?" she was saying to herself ; "surely I didn't grumble ; I only told her that I felt of more use in London, that here there is scarcely anything to do ; and it's all true—it's all true. And such a short letter, when I want to know so many things!"

"DEAR CHILD,—Your grandfather is not well, so no time for many words. Everything else just as usual."

Why doesn't she say what is wrong with grandfather? And everything can't be as usual; it was always changing—never two days the same. But here— And what does she mean by this: 'Read your Bible, child. Who waited thirty years before He began His work? Was it time lost? What did Philip think when told to go along the way from Jerusalem to Gaza, *which is desert?* Remember, he had had a busy time at Samaria. And what of St. John in the Isle called Patmos—was it nothing to do with them, think you? Read on, child, and see for yourself. Go out, like Elijah, and stand upon the mount before the Lord, and hear the still small voice which maybe you could not hear in the din of our noisy home. No time for more.—Yours, S. R.'

"Did I grumble?" Rie asked herself for the twentieth time; and the bright eyes that could dart such gladsome glances, and sparkle with such eagerness and zeal, now filled with tears, and brimmed over. "'Waiting, working, suffering, the three lessons of the Divine life,' as Uncle Stephen says. The first sounds so easy, and yet, after all, to me it is the hardest. But how do I know?—what have I had to do with suffering? I fear if I cannot wait, I could not suffer. But Grannie sets another lesson—listening. Well, there is no din here unless it be made by my own grumbling."

And Rie went to bed, still thinking over this letter; no thought of Alan. Miss Judith—is Alan thinking of her, or is it all a dream of Patty's?

But had those words of Alan passed quite unheeded? Was it no matter to the girl that he had loved her and wooed her as his wife? Stephen Gilpin, wondering, as Miss Judith and Patty, what had happened, scanned the face that met his day after day with such a clear

open gaze, and was baffled in his inquiry ; and, like Miss Judith, he was inclined to say it was nought but a fancy.

"He'll forget it in a week," the girl had said to herself, "and so will I, and nobody shall ever hear of it from me. A man can't like it to be known that he's said such a stupid thing." And then she had set herself to forget, and I believe she had succeeded as nearly as is possible. And then Easter came and passed. He had said he would come back again and ask the same question over again. He had done no such thing, which made it quite plain he had forgotten all about it, as she hoped he would. Perhaps he was like his father, who, some people said, asked every lady he met to marry him ; but this, Rizpah had felt, was an ungenerous supposition. She had bidden him good-bye, and he had taken her at her word, as of course she meant he should ; and if he did ask the next lady he met to marry him, why, it would be a good thing, and she should be very glad. This was the drift of Rizpah's thoughts when she thought at all about that morning's conversation, but she always took herself to task when she found herself thinking about it, and told herself she was a conceited goose. And then she looked in the glass to see if her secret could be read in her face, and wondered how any one could have imagined himself in love with such a very ordinary-looking lassie.

"Imagine poor little Rie presiding at dinners and entertainments—a county lady, called 'my lady!'" she laughed to herself. "Oh, how I should hate it! No, no; feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, that is not half so fatiguing, and twice the fun! But how Grannie would frown. 'Self-pleasing, Rie,' I hear her say—dear old Grannie! I will listen for the Voice, and hear what It says to me."

"I am going for a long walk, uncle—right away along the road beyond the bridge. I've made such a delicious little pudding for little Sammy Jobson. He can't get over his whooping-cough, and has no appetite, and he likes my puddings. I shan't be back for ever so long. Perhaps you'd walk out presently and meet me somewhere, and we'll come back together. Come as far as the bridge," and Stephen agreeing, she put on her round hat and started.

The pudding business was soon dispatched, and then Rie wandered up the hill-side and watched the rushing streams coming down the mountain, making haste to join the river below. The hill-tops were far above her ; and great shadows from the clouds swept across the slopes of the hills. The trees were in full leaf, for it was an early summer ; the hawthorns had dropped their snowy blossoms, but the wild-roses were blooming, the furze and broom resplendent in their golden raiment. Rie sat down by a bubbling stream, dipped her hands in it, and splashed the cool water over her face, then sat dreamingly watching some white butterflies skimming from bush to bush, and the bees going in and out among the spiky furze. A graceful, silvery birch waved above her head ; close by some frisking lambs were disporting themselves, stopping from time to time to look at her with staring eyes. A stout, black-legged lamb had taken up his position on a little mound, and was butting with his round head each playfellow who sought to displace him ; then half-a-dozen made a rush, springing high into the air like kittens, raced down the hill and back again, a gleeful band of brothers in their merry play. Rie watched and laughed. Then the band of roysterers scampered off and disappeared, and unbroken silence reigned. Then a soberer mood came over her. The



vast stillness of the everlasting hills wrapt her round ; thoughts of the unbroken calm that had reigned there for centuries, while far off men fought and toiled and died, kings rose and fell, empires were founded, flourished, and passed away, wrought in her a kind of awe she had never felt before. She could not hear even the faintest echo of the sounds which tell of life and motion, not even the hum of a bee or the chirp of a bird broke upon the silence. "Alone!" she thought. "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant hears." The silence was still unbroken ; no wonderful voice came sweeping up the valley as Rizpah had half thought it would ; but the grey mountain-top looked down on her, and bade her remember, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; yet My kindness shall not depart from thee." The laughing beck trickling down the mountain-side suddenly found a voice, and sang of the streams that make glad the city of God ; the split rock in whose cool shelter Rie had hidden herself, told of the smitten Rock of Ages ; the very stillness and silence grew eloquent of peace and rest ; and suddenly from the waving birch near at hand a bird broke forth in song, so sweet and clear that to the listener's ear it seemed to say, "Rejoice, rejoice ; and again I say unto you, Rejoice."

"Uncle Stephen did not say that, and yet I'm sure he knows it. Waiting, working, suffering, rejoicing ; yes, that is part of the Life Divine. No grumbling, Rizpah Rae. 'Rejoice, rejoice, and again I say unto you, Rejoice.'"

The bird piped on, pouring forth its whole soul in song, and Rizpah sat and listened. Once she turned her head cautiously, hoping to discover the minstrel ; but it was a modest singer, and at the slight movement

she made it removed to a tree at some little distance, and sang more timidly than at first. By and by it spread its wings, and went off to earn its living. Rie was sorry, and sat still hoping it would soon return; when she saw no more of it, she got up and began to think it was time to go and meet her uncle. He would reach the bridge before she did. So she left the shelter of her rock, and the bubbling stream, and tripped down the hill, and soon regained the road, and there sure enough was her uncle. But not alone—Rizpah's heart gave a bound, half of annoyance, half of nervousness, as she recognized the figure by Stephen Gilpin's side to be that of Alan Wyke.

"But of course he has forgotten," she said to herself. "I shall take that for granted," and so she did. Stephen Gilpin, who was rather short-sighted and very absent-minded, thought the girl was not as friendly as usual, which was a pity, as Alan was even heartier and more genial than of yore. Why couldn't she say she was glad to see him, as anybody else would have done? Stephen Gilpin was not pleased with his little girl that day, and she was not long before she found it out.

And Alan?—what was his thought as he grasped the hand which was given almost reluctantly, and tried to read the eyes which would not meet his? It will be imagined that he read his fate in these very unmistakable symptoms, and like a wise man retreated without further imperilling his peace of mind.

"She is angry," he thought to himself as he marked the rising colour in her cheeks, and the quick, impatient step which seemed to find it impossible to keep pace with Mr. Gilpin's deliberate walk; but he did not mind. I think he was rude enough to be rather amused, which would have made Rie furious had she guessed it.

He was telling Mr. Gilpin about Mr. Rae's illness, and this he knew would bring the girl back to walk beside them ; she would wish to hear, and it would be strange if, when she heard, she could refrain from asking questions, and he wanted to make her speak to him.

Stephen Gilpin was concerned, hoped the journey to Scotland would ward off any serious illness, asked a few questions, and then appeared satisfied. Alan watching Rizpah knew that she was not.

"Uncle Stephen," she said at length, "what is it they fear for my grandfather ? I don't understand."

Mr. Gilpin looked at Alan, and Alan looked at Rie.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "did you ask me a question ?"

"No ; I was speaking to my uncle," she replied hastily.

"But why ask me ? Mr. Wyke can tell you more than I can, having seen Mr. Rae so recently, and being half a doctor too."

"I do not like doctors," she said. "Tell me, Uncle Stephen, what is the worst they fear for grandfather ?"

"Tell her, Alan," the parson said, drawing her little hand within his arm and patting it fondly ; "she's a bit of a thing, but a woman all the same, as she often reminds me."

And Alan explained the danger that threatened the over-worked London vicar ; and spoke hopefully of the benefit to be derived from absolute rest. Rie listened, but said nothing.

"Why has he come here again, when he knew I did not want him ? Oh, of course, I know he has forgotten, but still it is horrid of him to come back so soon. And Uncle Stephen will ask him in to lunch, and there's nothing but cold meat ; and Maggie's got a long rent in her gown ; and I'm sure I never thought of meeting any

one when I went out in this old frock. How people can like gentlemen's society is more than I can comprehend ! They always come in upon you when everything is in a mess ; chimneys smoking, puddings burnt, servants cross ; and they look as neat as new pins all the while, and pretend not to see. I hate them all."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### HAS HE FORGOTTEN?

"And after her, came jolly June arrayed  
All in greene leaves, as he a Player were."—SPENSER.

"Green leaves and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,  
And singing and loving, all come back together."  
COLERIDGE.

"YOU said you should take a few days' holiday at Easter, and this is June," Patty said to her brother when he made his appearance somewhat suddenly at the Lowes. "Why didn't you keep your word and come before?"

"I don't see that my coming or going can matter much to anybody," Alan replied. "I couldn't come at Easter, and then one thing and another came in the way; and so, as you remark, it is June, and June is the right time for these parts, as everybody knows. But tell me, Patty, what is the aspect of affairs. How is Lady Wyke?"

"I scarcely know. How does she seem to you?"

"By no means so extinguished as I expected to find her; but it must be a frightful struggle, and I am afraid she'll give in some day. How jolly you and she have made the house look; I scarcely knew it."

"Ah, if you only knew how we have fought every inch of ground, how many days we argued over every yard

of muslin and chintz, and the tears we shed over the drawing-room carpet."

"Tears, Patty?"

"Yes, truly, we wept in public, and laughed in private. Lady Wyke felt that old carpet was a personal insult. I felt it for her; couldn't imagine how Sir Andrew could bring her to such a house; and at last we told the servants to admit no callers, we couldn't face them in such a room. Lady Wyke said she supposed she must let all her friends know why she was always out. That settled the matter. How do you like your room?"

"I didn't know it again, but I own I missed my old bed with the deep cavern in the mattress. What has happened to it?"

"Only been pulled to pieces and done up again. I chose the paper and curtains. Sir Andrew vowed he would send the bill to you."

"I haven't seen it. But he's sold Dandy?"

"No, never!—when was it? I saw the horse a few days ago."

"The men told me he'd sold him to a man at Penrith. I've been wondering all the morning whether I'd take no notice, or have a reckoning with Sir Andrew."

"You were fond of that horse, Alan."

"Yes; there was a day when I cared for nothing and no one but Patty and Dandy," her brother said. "I confess I was rather put out when I missed the old fellow this morning. Old George said Dick should have made a mistake, and taken the old gentleman's horse to market instead of mine."

"So he should. Dick is an idiot. What will you do, Alan?—ride Gip while you are at home?"

"Yes, or hire a horse. Don't say anything about this business, Patty."

"No, indeed. I've my own little quarrels, and these are quite sufficient for my requirements: shall you say anything?"

"I shall see, it may come in handy. I wondered why Sir Andrew was so polite last night."

"He was rather taken aback when we heard you were coming. I did not understand it. Alan, what is this about that old parson you like so much,—Rie's grandfather? You travelled with him, didn't you?"

"Only part of the way; he and Mrs. Rae have gone on to Scotland. He is knocked up, and gone off in a hurry to rest. Did Rie tell you?"

"Yes; and the other man in the hospital who was so bad, is he better?"

"Fitzacre? He's patched up for a time, and gone off abroad. But about Rie? Patty, how is she getting on in this far-off corner of the world? Do you see much of her?"

"How can I? It's too far off for a proper friendship. Are you going to scamper over there every day?"

"Every day, Patty! Well, certainly old Gilpin is the most conversable being in these parts, and a capital fellow to saunter about the hills with."

Patty smiled incredulously; but Lady Wyke coming in at that moment, the conversation was interrupted. Patty was wanted to write cards of invitation for a garden-party, and Alan went off, and paid the visit related in the last chapter.

He lunched at the Vicarage, and appeared to think the cold mutton very good. "All pretence," was Rie's muttered comment; her hair was more determined to be rough and curly than ever; she had no time to change the old frock, and was truly miserable. "What is the use of going out to meditate and make good

resolutions on the hills," she asked herself, "if people will be so disagreeable?"

The two gentlemen, however, seemed in no way aware that they were disagreeable; they sat a long time talking in the lazy hours of a hot afternoon, and Rie was creeping off to scold Maggie about the hole in her gown, and to exchange her own, when her uncle said—

"Bring your knitting, child, and come and sit in the garden, it is too hot indoors."

Now Rie had been trained to obedience, the least deviation from that straight path always weighed upon her conscience; but for once, she told herself, she should venture to be her own guide. "If uncle had known all about it, he would tell me to keep out of the way," she said to herself, and accordingly, instead of fetching her knitting, she sat down at her bedroom window and began a letter to her grandmother, with the resolve not to go down again till the visitor was gone. She had guessed, and rightly, that her uncle would soon be engrossed in his talk, and forget that he had bidden her to join them in the garden; she wondered a little what Alan would think when she did not appear, and hoped he would understand that she preferred his room to his company. "Not that I should not have been very glad to see him and talk to him, if he had not been so silly," she said to herself; "it makes a change even to see him. I wish Patty would come with him, but perhaps she might guess what has happened, and that would be tiresome. Dear me, it is all most provoking. Well, now I'll write to Grannie," and she addressed herself to the letter in sober earnest.

But by and by the conversation which was going forward below became very interesting. Rie always liked to listen to her uncle; his pithy sentences and



quaint ideas had a great charm for her, and Alan had a pleasant voice in speaking as well as singing ; listening to him recalled those days when she dislocated her wrist on Miss Wyke's doorstep, and spent some pleasant days in that house. She could recollect some of the songs he had sung for her diversion, always at Miss Judith's command in the first instance, but going from one to another as if he could not desist. Rie was passionately fond of music ; but it had been part of her grandmother's stern training, that all studies not strictly necessary should be excluded, and music had not been admitted into Rizpah's school-room. Rie wondered if she could sing ; Mrs. Rae had once said in a tone that admitted of no question, "The Raes never sing a note in tune, and their voices are like the creaking and banging of doors"—so Rie had shut up her rosy lips, and never allowed herself to hear her own voice even in a hymn-tune in church. And yet when she had listened to Alan and Patty, and to other young friends, a great longing had possessed her to try her powers. "I might go ever so far up the hills, where nobody can hear, and try what sort of noise I bring forth ; but perhaps I shan't know if I'm a thrush or a screech-owl, so where's the use ? Well, my letter doesn't get on, listening to those two down-stairs ; what strange things they talk about !"

Then she wrote on steadily for a while ; the voices ceased. Was he gone ? No ; they had gone round the garden to look at the bees ; well, most likely he would not return. "How fond he is of uncle !—it was horribly conceited of me to fancy he came to see *me*. Why, we have scarcely exchanged a dozen words. There, he's gone,—what a blessing !"

That evening Stephen Gilpin sat long silent watching the sunset glory over his beloved mountains. Rae and

he were seated on a low wall where they could command a prospect of which he never wearied. The parson was lost in thought. Rie, who had little sympathy with his long periods of contemplation, laid her cheek against his shoulder and said at last—

“I wonder what you are thinking about, Uncle Stephen?”

He stroked her cheek gently with his rough hand. The parson dug his own potatoes, and did much manual work in all weathers, and had never heard of Pears' Soap, so his hand *was* rough, though his heart was very soft. He stroked her cheek, but he made no answer. There was a look on his face which seemed to say that his thoughts were not all happy ones, and so it was. Stephen Gilpin had been gazing that afternoon long and earnestly at a face which always recalled the memory of his one great love. Had Alan known how strong was the resemblance which he bore to his dead mother, he might have guessed the meaning of the long, wondering gaze his friend so often fixed on him; for Alan knew Mr. Gilpin's love-story, though Rie did not. It was so long ago that Alan deemed it quite a thing of the past, the mother was but a name to him. He never guessed how vivid a reality she was to her old lover, nor ever dreamed how her eyes looked through his, and how many of his movements, ways, and gestures made the dead mother live again in the parson's memory. These were the thoughts which Rie begged to hear; it need not be said she begged in vain. “O dreams begun, ne'er to be ended.” There was pain in the remembrance of those dreams, but that pleasant kind of pain which we would scarce be without even if we could.

“I am glad there is nothing of the father about him,” he said to himself. “Had there been, I could not have

him here. Had he loved her it would have been different ; but he never did,—no, never."

That evening, when Alan reached home, he found the drawing-room deserted and Patty watching for him on the stairs, her finger on her lips, and every sign of suppressed excitement. She made him understand he was to ask no questions, and beckoned to him to follow her to the housekeeper's room. The old woman was there with a flush on her pale face and lines of anxiety on her brow.

"Alan, Alan, come in and shut the door ; we want you to help us. Lady Wyke is very poorly, and she has gone to her room, and Nan says we *must* keep Sir Andrew from bothering her,—we *must*. Do you understand, Alan ?"

"Yes, it must be done," said old Nan, "he must not go near her. Mr. Alan, you must see to it."

"What shall I do ?—lock him into his study ?"

"Whatever you like ; but manage it somehow, Alan, and don't tell him she's ill."

"But have you sent for the doctor ?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, Alan, if you'd only get him out of the house. He was worrying all the morning, and Nan says he'll be the death of her if he begins again."

"Poor thing, she's nervous and frightened enough as it is," said old Nan, the tears gathering in her eyes. "Master Alan, sure you can manage something."

"Don't mind how many lies you tell, Alan," urged Patty, trembling with excitement.

Alan stood pondering. "Where is he ?"

"Just come in,—didn't you hear his voice ? He's looking for her, I dare say. Oh, stop him, Alan, before he comes up-stairs."

And Alan took a sudden resolution and went downstairs.

"I was looking for you," he said in a careless tone, as he met his father passing from room to room. "What's this story they've got in the village about B——'s Bank? Do you understand it all?"

"What story? B——'s Bank? Whatever are you dreaming about?"

"Oh, I thought of course you knew. I heard somebody say there was a rumour it was going to the bad, and they might shut their doors any day. Is there any truth in the story, do you suppose?"

"Don't know, don't know; never heard anything about it. Who told you? Where's Lady Wyke? Where's Patty? It's close upon dinner-time."

"But I say, wouldn't it be as well to look into this matter? Surely you're interested in it to a considerable extent."

"Well, suppose you go over to L—— and see what people say,—quietly, of course."

"Me! Oh no, thank you, I should make a mess of it. I thought of course you'd go yourself. You could catch the last train, sleep in L——, and find out in the morning."

Sir Andrew hesitated; he hated to be thought to follow any man's suggestion, and his son's most of all. Alan knew this well enough, and suddenly changed his tone.

"After all, perhaps it wouldn't be of much use, you're not a man of business, I fancy people always take you in," and thereupon Sir Andrew promptly decided to go.

"I can't wait for dinner; order the dog-cart, Alan, and fetch my bag."

And so dutiful was Alan that he never left his father's

side until he had seen him driven from the door ; then he turned back into the house, muttering—

“ Yes, people do take you in precious easily sometimes. Gone, Patty ! ” he said, looking up at the girl’s laughing face, which was watching at the top of the stairs the whole proceeding ; and she darted down-stairs and flung her arms round his neck.

“ Was there any truth in that story ? ” she inquired.

“ Oh yes ; quite enough for the purpose. Now you and Nan can breathe again, I suppose. Is there anything else to be done ? ”

Patty thought not ; her brother was a very good boy, and might go and amuse himself ; she was going to stay with Lady Wyke for a little while, and Alan went off to smoke and read the papers and think about Rie. Yes, to think about Rie. He had gone to Langdale that morning in a very doubtful frame of mind, asking himself, should he take her first answer as a final one ? He had come away more than ever determined that he would win her yet. So he sat and thought about her. The vision he had carried with him during the last five months in London was of a distressed and tearful little maiden ; to-day he had seen her again, she was no longer tearful, but angry, and this Alan interpreted as a hopeful sign. He smiled to himself as he thought how angrily her little foot had tapped the ground while they stood talking together on the bridge, how doggedly silent she had been all dinner-time, and how carefully she had avoided saying good-bye to him. He was amused also as he reflected how perfectly unsuspecting the parson was ; he had wondered why Rie kept out of the way, “ such a sociable little woman as she was ”—and then had explained her absence in a way entirely satisfactory to himself,—“ Our talk bores her, Alan ; she has no patience

with argument, says we make a great deal of fuss about nothing, and are such intolerable slow coaches in arriving at any conclusion." But Alan believed that he understood the girl's absence better. "My little queen," he said to himself; "how erect she stood; as if determined to make the most of her small stature; and how resolved she was to keep me in my place!" And then he considered whether he should go to Langdale again the next day, and decided it might be better and wiser to refrain. Then he began to think of Lady Wyke, and to wish the doctor would come; and he made one or two journeys to the housekeeper's room in search of news; but old Nan was with her mistress, and he returned unsuccessful.

It was in the early morning that Patty was roused from a very light slumber by the old nurse coming in and sitting down on her bed, and saying, "Well, my dear, it's all over, and you've got a little brother to amuse you; and Lady Wyke—well, she's nicely, as far as one can see; but, deary me, that nurse! I never saw the like."

"Oh, Nan, it's really over! What a blessing! Never mind the nurse; tell me about her and the baby."

"Oh, my dear, the baby!—well, they do say wonders will never cease; but this child is a curiosity, and no mistake. Seems it's come into the world in a passion; does nothing but scream and shout; and if it could but stand I'll be bound it would stamp. When I think of Master Alan, and the night his mother lay dying, and he doing nothing in the world but smile on my knee, I begin to wonder what evil luck has possessed the house ever since."

"I shall get up, Nan; I want to see this child, and I must go and tell Alan."

"Well, I shall go back to my lady. I don't fancy that fine nurse. Trained indeed! I should like to untrain her."

"Oh, don't quarrel with her, Nan; so long as she is good to Lady Wyke, let her go her own way. How I wish Sir Andrew would keep away!"

"He's given orders the dog-cart should meet him at five, so they tell me. My lady will have one quiet day."

Old Nan went away, and Patty dressed quickly.

"It will be lovely to have a baby in the house," she said. "I hope it will live and do well. But really, Alan," she said, as they sat at breakfast together, "it's a most odd-looking child. I can't think why; its mother is comely enough, and its father is a handsome man, there's no denying it. But this child has big black eyes and black hair, and it stares at one, and then makes frantic attempts to scratch its own eyes out, and it screams so that I thought it must be ill; but they say it is an uncommonly strong child."

"Don't all babies go on in that style? I remember going to a church once, when a curate with a fiendish grin on his face was christening a host of babies, and you might have thought they were all being murdered. They scream at the doleful prospect of soap-and-water and clothes, that's all. What does Lady Wyke say to him?"

"I haven't seen her yet. Nan says she is serenely happy. Oh, Alan, if we could only keep Sir Andrew away from her!"

Alan whistled. "I'll leave that to you, Patty," he said; "no chance for me again."

"Put the doctor up to saying she must see nobody at all to-night. You might do that."

"As if that would stop Sir Andrew! Patty, you

know better. But if the man has any sense he'll say that of his own accord. He knows our respected parent."

"Alan, I wish you'd come up into the dressing-room and see the baby; the cradle is there, and I do so want you to see him."

"No, thank you; your description is not inviting. I'll wait till my brother has resigned himself to his fate, and given up lamenting. I quite sympathize with him; life *is* a queer thing; but you'll make it bearable for him, Patty, as you did for me when I was young."

"Alan, you are such a dear old boy! Who taught you to say such pretty things, I wonder?"

"I am practising, Miss Patty, against the time I go a-courting. Having got two brothers, you'll be demanding a sister soon."



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### GOING A-COURTING,

"She raised to me her quiet eyelids twain,  
And looked me this reply,—Look calm, yet bland ;  
I shall not know, I will not understand."—J. INGELOW.

THAT "going a-courting" did not seem likely to prosper as our hero had been sanguine enough to hope. Rie had quite made up her mind, she told herself, that Alan should not have a chance of saying any more silly things to her, and accordingly she dodged him in every possible way, always seeming to divine in some unaccountable fashion the exact time he would come. Her pleading, "Please, uncle, don't ask Mr. Wyke to lunch every time he comes, it makes Maggie so cross," sounded perfectly natural, and Stephen Gilpin had remembered her request as long as he ever remembered anything of the kind. It made him very unhappy to seem so inhospitable, but Maggie's temper demanded consideration ; she was a steady girl, and his sister had been fond of her, and bidden him be good to her. So Alan would arrive early in the morning, see nothing of Rie, who was teaching in the school, and not being invited to stay, was compelled to depart when the dinner-hour arrived. The parson was always glad to see him, and Alan enjoyed his company ; but he had an unpleasant impression that he was being outwitted, and this riled him exceedingly. "If she doesn't care for me,

it won't hurt her to see me," he reflected. "No ; she has some crotchet in her dear little head, but I must be more sure that she doesn't care for me before I give her up."

Then he tried the afternoon. "Rie has only just gone out, off to one of the farms," the parson explained, and Alan suspected she had spied his approach from a distance, and gone out to avoid him. After a while he proposed a walk ; should they go and meet her ? But the parson had been for a long tramp over the hills that morning, and was tired. With considerable ingenuity Alan drew from Mr. Gilpin, still perfectly unsuspecting, the particulars he wanted as to the whereabouts of this farm. It was quite off the beaten track, but what did that matter ? And consequently for once Rie found her carefully-laid plan a failure ; and about half-a-mile from home, just when she had left off thinking about him, Alan sauntered along the road to meet her, with the air of a man who finds time hang heavy on his hands, and is trying hard to dispose of it as best he can.

"I've a particular reason for not wishing to be home early to-night," he said. "Mr. Gilpin was tired, and did not want a walk, so I came along the road to meet you. Let me have that basket."

No ; Rie preferred to carry it ; there were some eggs in it, and Mr. Wyke would break them. Alan was sure he should do no such thing, and must have the basket. No ; he should not.

"You never think I mean what I say," Rie protested, "and I always do,—always."

"I am quite sure of that," Alan replied, "but isn't it a pity to be so inexorable ? It would be so pleasant for other people to have their own way occasionally. For instance, I should be so proud to have that basket, and prove I can be trusted even to carry eggs."

Rie shook her head.

"I cannot risk my eggs," she said. "I want them for my brown hen, she is determined to sit ; and I have no eggs for her."

"I feel humiliated," Alan answered, "but it is my fate, and I submit. I never get my own way—never ; while you, Miss Rizpah, make your own circumstances, and have never known a reverse of fortune."

"Haven't I, indeed ?" Rie exclaimed indignantly. "If I had my own way, do you think——" She stopped, and coloured violently.

"Do I think what ?" said Alan, quietly.

"No, I shall not tell you, you would think me rude."

"Shall I finish your sentence for you? You were going to say, 'If I had my own way, do you think I would be walking along this hot dusty road with Alan Wyke?' Is it not so, Rie?"

"If it is so, I cannot help it."

"Yes, you can ; say so, and I will go."

"I do not want to be rude, but it is true."

"You are sure, Rie? We were playfellows once, and very good friends. When did you begin to find me so insupportable? Why can't we be friends now?"

She turned away from him, and busied herself arranging the eggs in her basket, to hide the blushes that were mounting to her brow as the thought flashed through her mind—"Is that what he means?—has he changed his mind?—are we to be only friends?—and I have been fancying he meant what he said before, and he sees I thought it. Oh dear ! oh dear ! what can I say?"

"Well, Rie, is it utterly impossible to be friends?"

He spoke so naturally that her self-control came back. She tried to speak carelessly.

"Friends ! Oh, well, after a fashion. We have not much

in common, I should think ; but I dare say we can discuss the weather and crops, and occasionally a book perhaps ; but that is hardly my idea of friendship."

"Nor mine," he replied, and they walked on in silence, until the Vicarage gate came in sight. Then he stopped, and holding out his hand—"Good-bye," he said cheerily. "I am glad we are to be friends after all. I was afraid I had offended you, Rie ; you seemed so determined to keep out of my way." Then he turned quickly away, and Rie put down the basket of eggs on a window-ledge, and ran up-stairs without stopping to speak to her uncle as she usually did. She was angry with Alan, and angry with herself ; angry with him for having disconcerted all her little plans, and angry with herself for being so disagreeable.

"Of course I shall be glad enough to be friends with him. Why couldn't I have said so in a sensible fashion ? What an idiot I am ! Having taken it into my head he meant something more, I have gone on in such a way that he sees what I think, and actually has to explain that he only wants to be polite and friendly. He said he should come back at Easter,—he didn't do so ; that proved of course that he had changed his mind, as I begged him to do. Did I really imagine that he must give up Uncle Stephen's friendship, which he enjoys so much, simply to keep out of my way ?"

So she scolded herself, and having reasoned herself into a conviction that Alan was as indifferent to her as she was to him, and that henceforward she should treat him with as little ceremony as the other *habitués* of the house—her uncle's old cronies among the farming folk, the parish school-master and clerk—she made herself neat and tidy and went down to tea. Will it be thought very surprising that this conviction did not prove as

entirely satisfactory as Rie thought it would? She began soon to ask herself why this was. There could be no doubt that she did not wish to marry Alan Wyke; that she desired nothing so much as that he should understand this once for all. Then why did she suddenly feel flat and dull?—and why did life appear utterly barren of events, or of any possibility of change? Rie was not satisfied with herself; she was afraid that somehow or other she had made herself ridiculous, and she was not sure how many people had found it out. "Perhaps he laughs about it with Patty," she said to herself, and her face flushed at the thought.

Meanwhile, Alan had gone away more contented than he had been for many days. Laugh at Rie—nothing was further from his thoughts.

"Poor little queen," he said to himself; "she has been brought up to think she has such a wicked heart and sinful inclinations that she cannot trust herself, and is half afraid that she might fall in love—she, a dedicated maiden, vowed to a higher life. Yes, we will be friends, and learn to know each other. I wonder how long the process will take. It won't do to hurry it, I perceive very plainly."

But circumstances were to be more propitious to the development of this friendship than he had ventured to hope.

About a fortnight after the arrival of the son and heir, as Alan persisted in calling the severe-looking infant, the clouds which had been for some days gathering on the domestic horizon burst with terrific fury. "A regular field-day," Patty described it to her brother, as she met him on the little bridge at the foot of the valley, returning from a long ramble up Helvellyn with an old school-fellow who was staying in the neigh-

bourhood. She had been sitting on the little bridge over the stream waiting for him,—“for really one daren’t speak in the house to-day. Sir Andrew has made a clean sweep, and dismissed everybody. I am not sure whether you and I are not included, Alan; but the worst of it is, the nurse has taken him at his word and gone. I told him he must undress the baby, for there would be nobody else to do it.”

“A cheerful state of things,” said Alan; “but what of Lady Wyke?”

“Oh, terribly upset, of course. She was so well last night, lying on the sofa by the open window and looking so nice, and now she’s so feverish. Nan won’t let her get up at all.”

“When did the nurse go?”

“By the afternoon train.” She said, “You’ll be the death of my lady, Sir Andrew, but I’ll not stay to see it.”

“Not fit for a nurse,” said Alan; “not equal to old Aggy. Well, Patty, what’s to be done?”

“We’d better go home at once, not linger here,” Patty said, jumping up and putting her arm through her brother’s. “I came to meet you to prepare you.”

“Wise Patty—how far are you involved in the row?”

“I tell you I am not sure whether I am not turned out of house and home. The beauty of these uproars is, that one never knows exactly what happened. All the servants are to go, specially Nan. Mrs. Grimes and George, and the young ones also. ‘Lady Wyke shall not be bothered with them any longer.’”

“I hope you reassured Lady Wyke, Patty, and told her that this used to happen once a month on an average.”

“Yes, of course, and she was a little comforted; but

not being strong, when I begged her to laugh, she only burst out crying. She is so afraid for the baby ; but I said he was quite capable of taking care of himself, which pleased her, poor thing. Now, Alan, what do you mean to do ? ”

“ Haven’t you telegraphed for another nurse ? ”

“ Lady Wyke begged I would not,” she said. “ Nan could do all she wanted. What do you think, Alan ? ”

“ Think—why, of course she must have a nurse, and one that can keep Sir Andrew in order too.”

At this point they had reached the house. The hall-door was open, and Patty entered quietly, her brother following. Sir Andrew was fuming and fussing about the hall, hunting for something among the coats which were hanging up in a side passage—grumbling and muttering to himself.

“ Not a creature to be trusted !—dishonesty, idleness, papers gone ;—purse next ! I’ll make an example—it’s that old villain, George. George ! George ! ” But George had retreated to the depths of his pantry, and no threats or oaths—Sir Andrew used plenty—would draw him thence.

“ There’ll be nothing for it,” said Patty, in a clear distinct voice as she went up-stairs, “ but to get the doctor’s leave to move either Lady Wyke or Sir Andrew. This house is not large enough for both.”

Sir Andrew turned sharply round at her voice, and snapped at her, but she was gone ; then he turned upon his son.

“ Where have you been idling all day, sir ? ”

Alan made no reply, and his father repeated the question, snarling and shouting—

“ Are you deaf, sir ? ”

His son’s face was pale, he bit his lips and gnawed the

ends of his moustache ; long ago he had taught himself not to answer his father without thought, and for the most part he was wont to give no reply to Sir Andrew's fits of fury. Now it seemed impossible to be silent.

"Surely you are aware," he said coldly, "that Lady Wyke is not well ; that her nurse has left her because of your violence ; is there to be a repetition of the old story of my mother's death ?"

"Your mother's death—*your* mother !" foamed Sir Andrew. "You don't know what you are talking about,—a silly !"

"I am talking of my mother, and your wife, and of the story of her death. If Lady Wyke is ill—and they say she is—the cause will soon be known, and indeed I don't know why any of us should feel bound to keep the secret. I for one shall stand on no such ceremony."

"What ! you threaten me,—you dare to threaten me !—but I'll have an end to this sort of thing. Who told you to come here whenever you liked, filling the room of better people, riding my horses to death, taking up the servants' time waiting on you, and teaching them to be insolent to their betters ? Who told you—— ?"

"All this we can settle some other time," said Alan, coolly, "without waking Lady Wyke and endangering her life by our disputes," and he walked away, leaving Sir Andrew still growling and grumbling as he slowly retreated to his study, there to brood over his wrongs, and thence to issue an hour later with all the airs of a deeply-injured and unappreciated person, suffering from unheard-of pangs of headache, deeply-wounded feelings, and injured sensibility. It was an old and often enacted scene ; but the wonder was that Sir Andrew never seemed to remember how old.

It was an uneasy trio that sat down to dinner that



evening. Sir Andrew had absolutely no appetite, could scarcely take his hand from his head, felt his own pulse, and wondered if he ought not to send for his own particular doctor. Patty could scarcely venture to raise her eyes from her plate, and suffered from a distressing inclination to giggle. Alan eat his dinner doggedly, and said nothing. Old George did not make his appearance to stand behind his master's chair as usual, only a young footman waited, who walked about on tiptoe, and dropped everything he touched.

"On purpose, of course," said Sir Andrew, whereupon Patty giggled, and Alan scowled. Never was a meal more rapidly dispatched. Patty slipped away as soon as possible, and Alan, who had no desire for a *tête-à-tête* with his father, followed her.

"Do you know, Alan," she said in a low voice, "I find that there's no chance of the regular nurse coming for at least a week? What are we to do? Nan hasn't the strength to do everything for Lady Wyke and the baby too."

"Tell him to see about another nurse," said Alan, looking towards the room where he had left his father; "it's clearly his affair, not ours."

But Patty had no inclination to follow this suggestion.

"I wish I knew how to nurse," she said. "Old Nan understands it all, and could tell me; but I've so little sense. I'm always afraid the baby will come to pieces if I touch him. I wish I'd been trained as Rie has! Oh, I wonder whether she would come and help us? She told me she'd been six months in the children's ward at a hospital; perhaps she wouldn't be afraid to touch that child."

"Afraid! I should think not," said Alan. "But

you'd better wait till you see how Lady Wyke is to-morrow."

But Patty was feeling too desperate to have any patience.

"It's all very well for men to say wait. Alan knows that no one will expect him to look after the baby, and Sir Andrew is perfectly well aware that no one will trust him to sit up with his wife; so it all falls on us, and yet I don't wonder that she will not hear of sending for any one else." And to while away the time while she was sitting beside her step-mother, Patty wrote a few lines to Rie, just to relieve her feelings, telling of the sudden departure of the nurse, and ending up, "Oh, Rie, I wish I'd been trained to nurse as you have! Why are girls never taught to be useful? Do come and see me and put me in the way of a few things, so that we may get along somehow till baby's nurse can come, which will not be for ten days at least. I wish you'd come and stay here and train me." And this note was dispatched early the next morning, and duly discussed by Rie and her uncle over their breakfast-table.

"Why shouldn't you go and help the poor girl?" said Stephen Gilpin. "A real bit of work, my dear; I congratulate you; pack up your things, plenty of caps and aprons, and I'll borrow a donkey-cart and drive you over"—but Rie had another thought, and looked doubtful. "Come, come, you're thinking about me," said the parson. "Don't you think I can do without you for a week or so? It will be quite a holiday for me, my dear. No busy little woman sending me off to bed when I want to finish my book, or making me drink twice as much tea as is good for me. Oh! don't tell me you don't want to go. Work, Rie, work; no shirking, little woman."

"You are laughing at me," the girl said, "but I should like to go and see Patty ; and really if I can be of any use——"

"Of course you can. Then it's settled, and I must go and find the donkey-cart."

And Rizpah Rae went lightly up-stairs to put a few things together in case Patty really wanted her to stay. A baby to nurse !—she adored babies, and in the old days the hospital babies had adored her. But was it right, was it wise ? Would Alan be always hanging about ? And what would he think ? Nonsense ; she was not going over all that again. He was just an ordinary acquaintance, nothing more ; and she could not keep out of his way for ever.

## CHAPTER XXV.

CHANGE MY MIND?—NO, INDEED.

“Oh, change thy thought . . .  
Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?”

SHAKESPEARE.

THE exclamation with which Patty greeted Rizpah—  
“Oh, Rie, you are a blessed creature! Now do stay  
and tell me how to take care of Lady Wyke and this  
squalling infant!”—settled the question which, until that  
moment, had been doubtful.

There was no reason why she should not stay, the  
girl admitted; and if she could help she should be very  
glad; and in less than half-an-hour she had found her  
way up-stairs, and had dropped into the place left vacant  
by the nurse the day before.

There was much astonishment and some little con-  
sternation when this move of Patty's was made known  
in the household. Sir Andrew raised his eyebrows, and  
wondered “What next?” Old Nan exclaimed, “My  
dear, what were you thinking about?—a young lady to  
come and nurse the baby!” and Alan's face grew grave  
to solemnity as he said, “Patty, suppose Sir Andrew  
flies out at her?”

But the deed was done. Patty looked piteous, and  
replied, “Oh, Alan, it is all very well for you to talk.  
How can I manage everything by myself? and the  
maids are all gone; and Nan and Mrs. Grimes will be

run off their legs; and the child screams and howls till I am beside myself. You don't know what it is to have all this on your hands. I wish you'd try and nurse that baby. I shake it and give it sly pinches, but nothing will stop it. It drives me as wild as Sir Andrew does."

"'Tis its father's son and no mistake," said Alan. "Poor Patty! I'm very sorry for you. Your cares are getting too much for you. When we're out of this wood I shall take you away somewhere for a spree. Meanwhile who knows?—perhaps Miss Rie will prove a great success."

The domestic hurricane had to some extent subsided when Rizpah took up her abode at the Lowes. True, it was growling away in the distance; the servants were giving vent to their feelings in the kitchen, the master in his den; but up-stairs Patty and Rie kept guard, and their territory was as peaceful as the tempestuous baby would permit, and nestling in Rizpah's arms, it seemed possible even he might learn in time to take life more serenely. He stared at her with his black eyes in a menacing style at first, as one would say, "Don't think to impose on me." But Rie assured him that he was a sweet pet—a darling and a love; and "for a wonder," as Patty observed, "he did not scratch her eyes out."

Rie thought him a very remarkable child, which ambiguous phrase his mother interpreted as a compliment, and thereupon declared that Miss Rae had great discernment of character. The nurse, she told Rie, had not understood the child any better than she had Sir Andrew, and it had been a most unfortunate affair; and then she hoped Rie would not let herself be tied to the house by the baby, but take nice walks with Patty. But she did not seem very sorry when Rizpah declared that she infinitely preferred nursing baby to any other amuse-

ment, and was sure she had had walking enough with her uncle to satisfy her for ever so long.

In truth, the baby puzzled her not a little ; and Alan's remark, "There will be war to the death when he grows up, if the same house holds him as his father," was but the echo of the little nurse's forebodings.

The girl had plenty to think about and wonder at during her visit in this strange household. She had heard enough of Sir Andrew to feel a certain amount of excitement and trepidation whenever he came in her way. She would have liked to hear something of the cause of dispute between him and the trained nurse who had departed. "I don't want to quarrel," she said to herself, "but if he meddles"—and she stretched her neck and drew herself up—"I think it will be the worse for him."

Every one in the house seemed to live on the edge of a volcano. Rie would have liked to understand a little more of the family politics ; but Alan and Patty were not inclined to discuss them, and Rie would not ask questions. One hint for her guidance Patty gave. It sounded strange, but Rie soon understood the motive. They were going down to dinner together the evening of Rie's arrival, when the daughter of the house slipped her hand through her friend's arm and, with a laugh, in which some suspicion of tears was mingled, whispered, "One word, Rie. You know we are a queer set, and there's no need to say who's the queerest ; but, whatever you do—even if we take to throwing the knives and forks at each other—don't show the least surprise. Look as if it were perfectly natural, and don't interfere in the smallest degree—it doesn't answer ; and if Sir Andrew is rather peculiar, you must make allowances. He suffers from—what shall I call it?—nerves, if you like—no ; we think it's ghosts."

That he suffered from something was evident. Rie, in her ignorance of the world, and her straightforward fashion, would have called it bad temper. But Rie was young.

Another matter which gave the maiden some cause for thought and self-examination was the perplexing question how she stood with Alan. Had he forgotten? Was he just an ordinary friend? She fancied he did not seem quite at his ease with her. Why was this? Happily for her peace of mind she knew nothing of a little scrimmage which had taken place between the father and son the day after her arrival at the Lowes, in which Alan had lost his temper most disgracefully, as Patty told him afterwards; and Alan himself owned that he had been a fool.

"You might have known that he would be certain to say she meant to be Mrs. Alan Wyke," Patty had observed. "Why could you not be cool, and take no notice? Now you have confirmed him in the notion, and we shall hear of it again and again."

"He shall *not* say it again to me," Alan had replied; but he knew that Patty was right, and he was miserable to think how impossible he should find it to be at ease with Rie henceforward. "There is nothing for it but to keep out of her way," he thought; and Rie being thus relieved of her fears on that score, grew more at ease with him; after all, it was plain he only meant to be a friend. Was she glad or sorry? Of course there can be no manner of doubt that she rejoiced; yet what pleasure is there in this world that does not partake in some degree of the nature of pain?

Relieved of the fear that had possessed her, Rie grew quite at ease. She liked to think that she might join in the fun that went on between him and Patty, and had

not the faintest suspicion of the terror which possessed him whenever she thus laughed and chatted with him in his father's presence.

"My little queen, she cares nothing for me, but I will win her yet. She a flirt,—she set her cap at any one! Small chance indeed should I have if she were ever to guess what he has said! Shall I go away until her stay is over? No; by some means or other he would make mischief between us. Shall I have one more try at once? It would be worse than useless, I fear." And in these questionings Rie's ten days' visit drew to a close. Ten days had seemed to promise boundless opportunities of forwarding his suit; they had come to an end, and found him no nearer to his desired object.

"You are a sharper fellow than I took you for," Sir Andrew one day remarked; "you see through the young lady's wiles; her tender interest in the baby; her affection for your sister; her arch simplicity and charming innocence of manner. Oh, you needn't gnash your teeth at me; all women are alike; you ought to be grateful for my hint which put you on your guard"—and he turned away before the words which were choking his son had burst forth.

Rie entered the room by one door as Sir Andrew left by another. She was looking her best and brightest in a fresh white dress and shady hat. Alan wondered why people said she was not pretty. Could any one look sweeter than she did when she smiled, or more perfectly enchanting when she laughed? Had ever eyes such a power of sparkling with joy, twinkling with fun, or softening with sympathy? Was she too small? No; tall women were odious. Of course there were exceptions, Patty was one, but on the whole Alan was convinced that it was a mistake for a woman to be tall. And then



her voice. Alan was critical about voices ; and what could be more musical than the tones with which she greeted him as he turned all hot and angry from his late encounter to meet her as she entered the room ?

She had come to collect certain small possessions which she had left in the drawing-room the night before—some books, work, an album, &c.,—and as he watched her moving lightly but quickly about, thinking just of the matter in hand and of nothing else, as was always her way, the doubts and questionings in his mind came to a sudden end, and regardless of prudence and common sense, he took an imprudent resolution.

“I am going to pack up,” she said, “and Patty said the drawing-room was strewn with my property ; please to bear witness that I am not carrying off her goods and chattels. But what is the matter ?—why are you looking so dreadfully solemn ?

How she wished the next minute that she had not asked that foolish question ! If she had only had the sense to pick up her books and run off with them, all that foolish talk which followed that question of hers would never have taken place. Patty was right, the Wykes had a most tiresome trick of fancying themselves in love. Yes ; it must have been pure fancy, for surely had he had his wits about him, Alan Wyke would never have said such absurd things, with two doors wide open, old George coming in to look for Sir Andrew, and an impudent-looking gardener’s boy peeping in at the window.

Rie never could remember afterwards what Alan had said, or what she had answered. She was angry and frightened. Angry that he should have taken upon himself to doubt that she had meant what she said when she had dismissed him so unceremoniously six months

before. He professed to think she might have changed her mind. Why, did he imagine she would have come to the Lowes if that had been the case? Why should he think so? What had she done to put such an idea in his head? "You said we were to be friends and nothing more!"

"Indeed no," Alan protested; he had never put any such limit on their friendship, which he still hoped would grow to something more. "Rie, listen,"—but no, she would not listen.

"Let me go," she said vehemently—he had taken her hand—"there is no knowing who will come in. I trusted you, and believed you meant what you said; it is cruel—unkind. You must not talk in this way. No, I can't; I really can't listen to you or wait. There is some one coming, let me go. Patty is calling."

"Never mind, Rie; stop one minute."

"No, no; what is the good in talking about it? If you really wish it, I am sorry; but you said we were to be friends, and so I came here, and now I wish I hadn't. Do you think I would ever have come, had I guessed this? Never!" and she tore herself away from him and fled up-stairs.

She passed Patty on the stairs, and tried but with small success to look as if nothing had happened; happily Patty had something on her mind and did not notice her friend's disturbed manner.

The baby was fretting and tiring his mother out, and she gladly gave him into Rizpah's arms, with the hope "that his nurse will manage him as well as you do, dear." Rie took him into the other room, and walked about with him, stilling his complaints and the angry murmurs of her own heart by the constant motion. "He said we would be friends; he deceived me. Now we can never be

friends again—and I had begun to love Patty so. Does she know? Has he told her? Does Lady Wyke, does Sir Andrew know? How am I to dine with them all to-day? I wish Lady Wyke would give up going down, and then I would excuse myself and stay with her. But no—why should I care? If he had been straightforward, I should never have been here; but that is not my fault. I shall have plenty of time to recover myself before dinner.” And then she looked in the glass and saw how flushed she was, and wondered why she felt so angry with Alan. “I suppose I ought to be flattered, but he should not have cheated me”; and then succeeded other thoughts of her lover which we are not careful to record, lest Rizpah Rae should appear strangely inconsistent.

Baby’s nurse arrived that evening, together with a new under-housemaid and kitchenmaid. Patty and her step-mother were much occupied with the thought of these changes, and they did not seem to notice Alan’s pre-occupied manner, or Rie’s unusual quietness. In the evening Rizpah slipped away to go and talk to the nurse about the baby, and to have a farewell chat with old Nan.

“Will she do, think you, Miss Rae?” said the old housekeeper. “But deary me, what’s the use in asking such a question? It isn’t the fault of the maids that they don’t stay, as you’ve found out, I make no doubt.”

“Lady Wyke likes her, and so do Patty and I; but she’s half afraid of the baby, and wants to know if I think he’s right in his head. Too early days to settle that, isn’t it, Mrs. Pudsey?”

“He’s the very image of his father, as I remember him a baby, my dear. Sir Andrew’s handsomer now than he ever promised to be. But oh, my dear, looks aren’t everything, and Mr. Alan’s face is far more to my

liking. Miss Rae, do tell me, why can't you fancy him? He's a good lad, he is."

"Mrs. Pudsey, who told you?" said Rie, the blood rushing to her face. "Was it Patty?"

"It's one as you'd never suspect, but a good friend to you all the same. It's old George, and nobody else."

"Old George!"

"Yes; old George it is. He's so fond of Master Alan it seems he understands every turn of his face; and he's watched you both till he's read the whole story, and to-day he came up here and sat down on that chair, and put his two hands on his knees, and he says, 'Mrs. Pudsey, it's not to be, it's not to be.' And when I said, 'How can you know, George?' he just answers, 'I see it in his face; but it's hard on him, it is; the lad never does get his own way and never has.'"

"It isn't good for any one to have his own way, Mrs. Pudsey; but perhaps George is all wrong," and she tried to laugh.

But the old woman shook her head.

"Nay, nay," she said, "don't laugh, or I'll be forced to think you have no heart at all."

"Mrs. Pudsey," said the girl, still blushing violently, "do you know that no one ever spoke to me of love before, and I hope no one ever will again! Some day I am going to give my whole life to work for God, perhaps in London, perhaps in India or Africa. I have thought of it always, it is my dream, and how can I give it up and live a do-nothing, idle life as a country lady, ordering dinner, calling, going to garden-parties, county balls, and killing the time as best I can? Don't you see it is impossible?"

She spoke impetuously, but the old woman stared blankly at her, in evident perplexity.

"I was thinking of Mr. Alan," she said, "and whether you loved him."

"It would be very awkward if I did," Rie said plainly ; "because I do not mean to marry him, or any one else either."

"Then it's true as old George said. I'm main sorry for my boy," the old nurse replied sorrowfully. "Are you quite clear you're not making your calling for yourself, my dear, and that when you've had a few years of your lonely life, you won't get very hungry for the love you've thrown away?"

But Rie was not to be talked out of her pet theory.

"There are hosts of girls who will suit him better than I," she said ; "and what matters it if I am hungry sometimes? I shall have a Love that will satisfy, and which will not weary of me."

Old Nan was silent. Rie's reasonings did not satisfy her, and she was sore at heart for her boy. Rie saw this, and said—

"I am afraid you and George are angry with me, Mrs. Pudsey ; but what would you have me do?—not marry him if I do not love him, surely?"

"Not love him!" said the old woman, to whom such a notion seemed an impossibility ; "my dear, everybody loves him."

"Except me," said Rie, smiling.

The old woman looked incredulous.

"Nay, my dear, but you will," she said ; "ask old George if there's any doubt of that."

"Dear Mrs. Pudsey," replied the girl, blushing and laughing, "I am sure Mr. Alan is a great deal too good for me. Will you tell old George so for me, and make my peace with him if you can? And now good-night ; I must run away."

Old Nan sat pondering when left alone on the strange crookedness in the lot of the boy, as she and George the butler called Alan Wyke.

“She’s but a slip of a lassie, not tall and shapely like Miss Patty, and yet she holds herself high and will have her way. Maybe she’s right, and not the wife for him ; but George says he worships the ground she walks on, and I would have liked him to have his own way just once in his life.”

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AN AFTERNOON WALK.

“Towards the hills  
Up through an ample vale, with higher hills  
Before us, mountains stern and desolate.”  
WORDSWORTH.

THE little vicarage at Langdale was unusually lively when the month of August arrived. The long holiday which the City parson had allowed himself was drawing to its close, and he was turning his face and his thoughts towards the south. But it was not much out of the way to return by the English lakes, and Stephen Gilpin made the old couple right welcome, and Rie was proud to have the entertaining of her grandparents. Together the two men lounged about the hills, talking, talking—the one of action, the other of contemplation—and they refreshed each other's spirits mightily. And Mrs. Rae went about the quiet little village, and wondered ceaselessly at the slow-moving, slow-thinking cottagers, sighing as she mentally contrasted the well-to-do, comfortable-looking old men and women, the clean, well-kept cottages, with the worn faces and dirty rooms of her London poor, and refused absolutely to believe in want or care existing there.

“Yet, Grannie, you would not live here, would you?” Rie asked playfully, for she knew well what the answer would be.

The old lady shook her head.

"I doubt if I could rest here," she said ; "there's a holiday feeling about the air, and holidays never suit me long."

Rie's face grew eloquent, her grandmother understood the expression of those speaking eyes.

"For you it is different," she said. "You are young ; a little work, and plenty of time to do it well, is the right thing for the young. Did you hear your grandfather telling of that young man who offered himself as curate last Christmas ? He had been only a year in orders, but he had been preaching four sermons a week, and it never seemed to have entered his head to think of the sufferings of his congregation. That's the way with them. Did you hear what Alan Wyke said ? 'Yes, and then they anathematize us because we don't go to hear them.'"

Rizpah was silent. Alan Wyke was evidently a great favourite with her grandmother. She wondered why, but did not like to ask. Once or twice she had asked herself if duty required of her that she should tell Mrs. Rae of all that had passed between herself and Alan ; but vanity formed no part of the girl's character—the thought of congratulating herself on her conquest had never once occurred to her, and she shrank from laying bare her secret. She was doubtful whether she had fulfilled all the forms usually observed on such occasions, and was more than half afraid her grandmother would be dissatisfied.

"I don't think I was rude to him, but I'm afraid I wasn't very kind, and Grannie might be vexed. No, I can't tell her."

Once she sat in an agony, fearing that all was lost and her secret was guessed. Stephen Gilpin, strangely



unsuspicious as he really was, was always dropping what seemed to her significant words.

"We used to see a great deal of young Wyke," he said one day to his guests, "but lately he has hardly been near the house. I don't know what's taken him. Rie, what was it?—did you tell him we didn't want him?"

"Uncle," said the girl, reddening, "you know better. Besides, I think you saw him last."

"Did I? Well, I never told him to stop away, so I thought it must have been you."

Rie thought her Grannie's eyes were on her. How she wished she could conquer that odious trick of blushing! What must Grannie think?

"Susannah," said her husband, "Stephen says Miss Judith Wyke is staying at Gilbanks, and she wants to have a picnic party near Blea Tarn, and we old fogies are invited. Will you go?"

"Why not?" said his wife. "I must see Judith before I go back to town. But who else is going?"

"The two young people from the Lowes, and possibly Lady Wyke. They'll drive here and pick up you and Rie, and Stephen and I will walk. We'll take our time, as we always do."

A picnic! And Alan and Patty to be of the party! Rie's cheeks burned and her heart beat quickly. If Grannie knew her secret, would she not say that she ought not to go? Must she really tell?

"I can't, I can't. What would Grannie say? Surely I must have blundered, or he would never have done it twice. And she likes him so much. Oh, I can never tell! But yet this picnic. A whole day with Alan and Patty on the hills! What shall I do? The old people will not want me, and Lady Wyke, if she comes, will stay with them. If I was only like other girls and had

headaches, there might be an excuse for stopping at home ; but there is no chance of that. What shall I do ? Well, I must hope something will happen to stop the picnic. Uncle Stephen said the weather was breaking up—perhaps there'll be a thunderstorm. What is it, Maggie ? ”

“ If you please, miss, Mrs. Rae said as I'd to go up t' fells to the farm after butter, I'd better see if you'd come too. She says you don't walk enough for your health.”

“ Yes, I'll come, Maggie ; I was longing to go out. I won't be a minute.”

Maggie was highly delighted. She liked a walk with her young mistress, and to hear tales of the queer doings in London town, “ where people didn't know anything about mountains, and were as thick on the ground as daisies in the meadows.”

But that afternoon Rizpah was by no means such good company as usual. She'd something on her mind for certain, and Maggie wondered if that tall lad from the Lowes hadn't something to do with spoiling that walk for her—there could be no doubt he'd left off coming to see the parson, and maybe Miss Rae was wondering why. If it had not been for a queer little bit of an adventure which they had, that walk would have been altogether a failure ; but as it chanced Maggie had something to tell when they returned home, and so had Rie too, for the matter of that.

This is what befell them. They had accomplished their errand, and were setting their faces homeward, when Rie said to her companion—

“ Walk slowly, Maggie ; I believe that's Sir Andrew Wyke in the road in front, and I don't care to overtake him.”

“ I should think not, miss ; such a cross old gent was

never seen. Shall we get over this wall, and go a bit round, and come out ahead of him?"

But Rie thought not; he might see them and guess their intention. So they loitered on their way, and, as it seemed to the active, light-footed girls, Sir Andrew loitered too; but as Rie was sure he had not seen them, that could not be intentional on his part.

Suddenly along the road, advancing towards them, came a vast flock of sheep, under no guidance whatever, but walking steadily along, scarcely staying to nibble the grass by the roadside, evidently with some definite purpose in view.

"Dearie me," said Maggie, "for sure and certain they're running away, and I shouldn't wonder if they be that same lot of sheep Daniel Dent sold to Sir Andrew Wyke t'other day. Folks did say they'd never bide, but make their way back straight where they were bred. Ay, Miss Rae, look at Sir Andrew then, he thinks he'll stop them. I wonder has he been looking for the creatures?" For Sir Andrew, evidently guessing the intention of the sheep, had begun shouting and waving his arms, "just as if he could do anything without a dog or two at his back," as Maggie suggested. "He's a regular daft body. He'll only scatter them on the fellside," she said; "better let them alone."

But when did Sir Andrew ever let anything alone in his life? thought Rie. She laid her hand on her companion's arm.

"Stop, Maggie; let's go higher up and wait till the sheep have gone by," she said. "How strange to see them! He can do nothing with them. See how they rush up the walls and tumble over them, coming down all right on the other side. He'd better let them alone. See what a rush they are making now."

"Ay, Miss Rie ; but they're all upon him. Poor old gent ! to be knocked down and trampled upon by a pack of dirty sheep. I reckon we'd better get out of the road," and the two girls lost no time in clambering over the wall into the field beyond. The sheep rushed tumultuously past, scrambling with each other, looking wild and frightened. Two or three old wethers with long twisted horns seemed to be the guiding and inspiring spirits. The girls watched them as they hustled each other down a steep bit of road and disappeared.

"Sure they're possessed," cried Maggie. "It's for all the world like the swine in the gospel as we hear about in church. Happen they'll all pitch themselves into Loughrigg Tarn if they tear along at that rate. What's to do now, Miss Rae? Must we go and pick the gentleman up?"

"He can't be hurt ; he can pick himself up," Rie said. "I wish he'd make haste and go."

But Sir Andrew seemed in no haste to rise from his humiliating position, and after waiting a few minutes, Rizpah decided that they must go forward and see if he were hurt. When they reached his side he was just beginning to rise, in fact he had progressed so far as to sit up in the dusty road and look about him. Evidently he was confused and perplexed to know what had happened. Stout, ready Maggie forgot that he was a Baronet and a cross old gent, and placing her strong hands under his arms, was about to haul him on to his feet, when he made a sudden effort and regained his footing ; but he still looked mazed and confused.

To Rie's inquiry if he were hurt he made no reply, and when she reiterated her hope that no harm had happened to him, he only replied—

"Eh? what?"—at the same time passing his hand

across his brow, and staring at her in an unrecognizing fashion.

"Miss Rae, Miss Rae, come away; he'll have been drinking," said Maggie. "He doesn't know what he's doing, perhaps he'll run and shout after us next." But Rie did not seem to share her companion's anxiety.

"I think he's hurt," she said. Then turning to Sir Andrew she said, "There's a stream down yonder, shall I fetch you some water?"

"Eh? what?" he repeated. "Sheep, did you say?—where are they gone?"

Rie explained that they had gone down the hill, but he did not seem to understand her, stared vacantly, and asked who she was.

She told him, and then added, "You are shaken by your fall, Sir Andrew. There's a farm not far off—won't you go and rest there, and send some one to the Lowes for the carriage? It is a long walk for you just now."

But at this proposal he seemed to come to himself.

"Go to Forsyth's farm!—no, never—nothing of a walk home," and thereupon he started off with a shuffling, uncertain sort of gait on his homeward way.

They were glad to be spared his further company, and after watching him a few minutes, they too set off home in the opposite direction to that in which he had gone, wondering much whether in his evidently confused state he would ever find his way.

Maggie was not to be shaken in her belief that he had been drinking.

"You don't know, Miss Rae—how should you? What have you seen of such things?"

"A deal more than you, Maggie," her young mistress replied, and the girl said—

"What! do folks drink too in London town? I thought

as how they'd no time for such work," and Rie was obliged to admit that unluckily folks found time to drink in most places. Still, as she knew Sir Andrew, and had never seen him the worse for drink, she was inclined to think he was hurt by his fall, perhaps partially stunned, and certainly not drunk.

Maggie had never heard any good of the gentleman, and would have gone on repeating the many tales she had heard to his discredit during the rest of the walk home, had not Rie checked her with some asperity. Gentlemen in his position did not throw candlesticks at their wives, or starve their servants, or stint their horses of fodder—such tales were pure inventions. Maggie ought to be ashamed to repeat them ; Mr. Gilpin would be shocked if he heard her. Nevertheless this little lecture did not hinder Maggie from telling her friend the postman, and her lover the carrier, that she had seen Sir Andrew chasing sheep on the fells, and that there couldn't be the least manner of doubt that he was more than half drunk, though Miss Rae, poor dear, wouldn't believe it.

Rie, of course, told the story in her own simple fashion. Sir Andrew seldom was fortunate enough to meet with much sympathy, and on this occasion his misadventure caused considerable amusement.

"Sir Andrew Wyke knocked down and trampled upon by an old sheep!" exclaimed Stephen Gilpin, and the two men laughed heartily over the Baronet's discomfiture.

"Rie thinks he was hurt," Mrs. Rae interposed.

"Hardly likely. He got up and walked off—didn't he, Rie? The old brute knocked the wind out of him, I dare say ; made him feel bad just for the minute ; and no doubt he was not best pleased that any one should

have been witness of his disaster. I wonder what he'll tell them at home."

"Will Dent find his sheep again?" inquired Mr. Rae, "or do you suppose they're gone for good?"

"They've gone straight home, no doubt. How he and Sir Andrew will settle it, I can't say. A few years back the stage coach coming along the road met a flock of sheep like these travelling back whence they had been brought. The coachman slashed them with his whip and tried to turn them, but the only result was that they scattered this way and that, and some of them were never seen again."

"I wish the girls had followed Sir Andrew and seen him safely part of his way. Rie, you should have thought of it," remarked Mrs. Rae reproachfully, and Rie, who had had some such regrets already, admitted that she ought to have done so, whereupon Maggie, who was spreading the table for the evening meal, broke in upon the conversation to explain that she had been so frightened she had persuaded Miss Rie to come away.

"Frightened?" said her master; "and why, Maggie?"

The girl hesitated to reply, looked at Rizpah, and muttered under her breath—

"He'd been drinking, Sir Andrew had, and folks did tell such fearful tales about him; she was always frightened to death if she met him."

"You're a simpleton, Maggie," said her master good-humouredly. "Now see if you can't practise a little self-restraint, and don't tell this story all over the village, there's a good girl."

"Well, I've only told Sammy the postman, and the folks up at the post, and Tyson's at the shop, and old Phyzacklae, and two or three more. It's not doing as you would be done by to keep such a bit of news to

yourself ; it will be as good as a bottle of physic to old Phyzacklae and his wife, and she's but poorly, is Aggy. Ay, but he did laugh, did Isaac !”

This remark needed some explanation, and when Maggie had disappeared the Vicar told his friends that these Phyzacklaes were no friends of Sir Andrew, old Aggy having been the nurse of the first Lady Wyke at the time of Alan's birth, and having fallen out with the lady's husband as the nurse had lately done. Stephen Gilpin's lips quivered, and his face was grave and stern as he spoke of those days, and his guests understood the reason and dropped the subject.

“Stephen was an ambitious fellow before those days,” the City parson said to his wife that night, when they were alone together. “I remember him well before his sister married Johnny. Had things gone differently with him, he'd never have buried himself in such a place as this ; but life seemed at a standstill with him for years after she married Sir Andrew, and then her death—well, it was a sad piece of business.”

“What amazes me,” said his wife, “is why Judith Wyke, who is a woman of sense, has let her brother go on as he has ; but he seems always to have ridden rough-shod over everybody, and never been interfered with in any of his evil doings till he met with that old sheep to-day.”

“There's something wrong about that child Rizpah—what is it, Susan ?”

“Wrong?—nothing but that we've spoilt her ; she's restless here, that's all.”

“Is it ? You must know best. Seemed to me that the girl had a new look in her eyes, and I said, Is it love ?”

Mrs. Rae gave a short, abrupt laugh.

“You're as sentimental as a girl, or as you were when



we were wed. In love, no? Why who is there here for her to love, I ask you?"

Her husband was silenced, but not entirely convinced.

"I think it *is* love," he said to himself; "but it's young, very young, and she does not know it herself." And thereupon he turned over and went to sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BESIDE THE SOLITARY TARN.

"A quiet treeless wood, with two green fields,  
A liquid pool that glittered in the sun."

WORDSWORTH.

THE day fixed for the expedition to Blea Tarn dawned, as so many days in Westmoreland dawn, very grey and doubtful-looking. Rie had been early at her window looking at the mists rolling over the face of the mountains, and wondering "Is it rain or heat that's coming?" Then she said to herself that she hoped it would turn to a regular downpour, and then this excursion would of course be abandoned, and her difficulty solved. But creeping up in her heart, forcing its voice to be heard, was another hope, and that said—"Why should you not have a pleasant day together? only one more; he will be going back to work, and you will see no more of him. That page in your life will be closed, take all the sweetness you can out of it, it has almost passed," and Rie went back from her window to her bed—it was too early to get up—and laid her face against her pillow, and shed a few tears, and then wondered why.

There was very little opportunity for the exercise of the considerations which usually fill a young maiden's mind on the morning of a party of pleasure—"What shall I put on?"—for Rie had but few dresses, and this question was therefore rapidly settled.

"Grannie might have brought me a new hat from Edinburgh," she said ; "if I do go to-day, I must do something to make my hat look fresh again, or Miss Judith will scold. She asked the other day if uncle and I had taken to earning an honest penny by hiring ourselves out as scarecrows to the farmers ? It isn't easy to satisfy both Miss Judith and Grannie too. How dreadful it must be to have a husband to make remarks on one's dress, as Sir Andrew does ! I wonder if Alan will be like him when he gets a wife. Well, I can't go to sleep, so I'll get up, and see what I can do with my hat. I wonder if Grannie will go in that wonderful hat she has been wearing in Scotland ; what will Miss Judith say to it ?"

But by the time the hat was trimmed, and a bunch of large daisies set daintily on one side, Rie's mood had changed. She would not go, she was sure it was wrong, —no, she would find some excuse and stop at home,—but all the time she knew she could do no such thing. If the others went, she would assuredly have to go too. If it would only rain !

"The weather looks bad, doesn't it, uncle ?" she said, as she gave him her morning kiss.

"Bad : no, not at all. Don't you know our skies better than that, little one ? We shall have a hot day and no mistake, but no rain for some time to come, if I know anything about the matter."

"Grannie, I think I'd better not go to-day ; I generally help in the school on Thursdays, and they are over-done with little ones just now. Won't you make my excuses with Miss Judith ?"

"You should have thought of that before, Rie, you knew which day they were fixing ; you cannot give up the expedition now. What is the matter with you,

Rie?" Such a keen searching pair of eyes were fixed on the girl that she made no further attempt to escape being one of the party; in another moment her secret would have been out.

"Nothing," she murmured in much confusion, and the old lady shook her head and said—

"You never used to be whimsical, child,—your uncle spoils you."

No; there was no help for it, go she must, and Rie resigned herself, and did not feel very unhappy about the matter. Her hat too did not look much amiss, and Maggie had made her white cambric look as good as new, so Rie was quite resigned and almost happy.

Punctually at eleven the wagonette from the Lowes was at the gate, Alan with the reins in his hand, Patty beside him, radiant and bewitchingly attired. She jumped down at once and said—

"Alan and I have been quarrelling all the way, so I am going inside; who will take my place? The gentlemen are not going to walk, I hope; it is much too far. Lady Wyke would not come. Sir Andrew is not quite well,—had a fall, he says. Oh, Mrs. Rae, what a love of a hat!"

And while she chattered on, the question of seats was settled. Mr. Rae and the Vicar would drive to their destination, lest, as Alan suggested, they should forget there was any luncheon in question, and not arrive till tea-time.

Mr. Rae took Patty's place on the box, and he and Alan were soon deep in conversation, "all about slums and such things," Patty asserted. "Alan is mad on sanitary reforms. Don't listen to him, Rie, they will make you sick. How people can talk of such horrid things on a

lovely day and in such a country as this, I can't imagine ; but Alan always loved to make himself miserable. Mrs. Rae, do tell me where you got your hat."

Mrs. Rae was nothing loath. Not having worn a hat for about thirty years, the purchase of this, a very singular construction, had been a matter of no small interest to her, and she related the whole history of it with much particularity—how she would have strings, and the people in the shop said they never heard of such a thing ; and how hot the sun had been ; and how she had bought a blue veil at Mr. Rae's suggestion ; and what a good idea it was, and more to the same purport. Then there was a pause, and Alan, turning from his seat in front, said to his sister—

"Patty, it was true, he did have a fall ; Miss Rae saw it, and knows all about it," and then his eyes met Rie's for the first time that day, and she fancied she read there the question, "Why did you come ? Have you changed your mind ?" Of course it was fancy, but as she answered Patty's eager questions, and related the story of Sir Andrew's misadventure, she was wishing that Alan would look at her again, so that she might let him read in her face the answer to his question ; but his glance had been a momentary one, and even though he was listening to her story, he was looking at Patty.

"Knocked down by a sheep, and run over by a number of them," Patty laughed. "That couldn't hurt him much. Was it that flock of sheep he has bought which have run away ? Then they did it out of spite. But I don't believe they really hurt him."

"I don't know about that," said Alan, gravely. "My father," he said, turning to Mr. Rae, "has certainly not seemed himself since that evening. I am afraid he *was* hurt."

"Better get him to see the doctor," suggested Stephen Gilpin, and Alan assented.

"He is more uneasy than he chooses to say," thought the old man. Rie, catching side-glances at his face, said to herself, "How grave he is! Does he really care, I wonder?"—but she was not thinking of Sir Andrew or his fall.

The drive was a merry one. Patty had no anxieties and no regrets, and she was bent on enjoyment. Mrs. Rae could be very quaint and amusing, and when they stopped to take up Miss Judith, who was staying near Dungeon Gill, she found them a very lively party indeed.

The road wound along under Lingmoor Fell until they came to their destined camping-ground by the side of the solitary tarn, sometimes so drear and solemn, but on that gorgeous summer day a sunlit pool of water, lying glistening under a cloudless sky. Up above towered the two huge peaks of mountain crags, looking solemnly down into the valley below. It was a still day, scarcely a breath stirred. Every now and then some water-fly skimmed the surface of the water, making a momentary ripple on its still depths. A few bees hummed among the heather and gorse, and here and there a tiny rippling streamlet made its way over mossy stones to the edge of the pool. No other human beings had invaded the deep solitude of the place; only a little moorhen or two glided about on the margin of the tarn, and watched her strange visitors with her bright little eye.

Miss Judith had much to relate of her journey from London, and her stay at Gilbanks; Patty and Alan had messages from their step-mother to deliver, and Mrs. Rae had stories of her travels in Scotland to relate. So the

early luncheon passed, and then the conversation became less general. The two elder ladies drew a little apart, and screened by large sunshades discussed many matters not of general interest. Stephen Gilpin was giving Mr. Rae a lecture on mosses, &c., and the young people were talking airy nothings. In truth of the three Patty was the only one who was quite at her ease ; the other two both talked to her, and avoided any direct address to each other. Did Patty notice it ? Trust Patty's blue eyes for seeing all there was to be seen, though Rie was sure no one could have guessed her secret, and Alan was quite indifferent who did and who did not.

Before long Mr. Rae, on whom the sense of returning strength acted like a constant stimulant, grew restless, and proposed to the others that they should do some climbing. He should not be happy to return to London without having been up a mountain or two ; they had driven all the way, he was longing to stretch his legs. Alan was quite agreeable to accompany him, but suggested that it would be better that Mr. Gilpin should drive the ladies back to the hotel, where they could get their tea whenever it suited them, and go and see the Fall if they were so disposed. Miss Judith grumbled at being so soon disturbed.

John Rae never could sit still, she knew. "A man close upon seventy ought to give up mountain climbing," she told him ; but this insinuation of failing power only made him more determined to go, and Alan seemed glad to break up the party, and was quite ready to start.

"Where are you going ?" said Patty to her brother. "Don't let that old man climb Scawfell or Bowfell."

"No, no," replied Alan, "we shan't go far ; but he is bent upon a scramble. Keep some tea for us, Patty ;" and he hastened after his companion, who was already

posting away at a great rate, to make it plain to all the world how strong and young he felt.

Patty and Rie spent much of the afternoon scrambling about near the waterfall, watching the water dashing down its cleft, and hunting for ferns and moss. When tired they found a comfortable rocky seat, and settled themselves to rest, and admire the rainbow lights gleaming across the water, when the sun shone upon the dashing spray.

"I like this place," said Patty; "I like the sound of the water, and to watch the spray among the leaves. Why couldn't they all stay here? Whatever possessed your grandfather to go scrambling up the hills? Do you know, Rie, I've had a horrid, uncomfortable feeling all day that something is going to happen—something horrid of course, I mean—and to tell the truth, I don't think your grandfather ought to go climbing mountains. I don't know what Alan was about to let him."

"Your brother could not stop him if he had made up his mind; and really, Patty, he seems so well now, I don't think it will hurt him. Grannie says he tramped about the hills a good deal near Ballater."

"Well, I hope he won't overdo it, that's all. What can this horrid feeling be, Rie?"

"What horrid feeling?"

"This idea, foreboding, misgiving, whatever you like to call it. It came over me suddenly while we were sitting at luncheon. Perhaps it's indigestion. I hope it is. Why do you look like that?"

Rie's eyes were fixed on Patty with an expression of terror.

"Because—because," she said, her lips quivering, "the same feeling came over me at lunch, and I never have indigestion."



"No more do I," and Patty looked positively distressed. "Rie, shall I tell you what I was thinking as we sat at lunch?—or rather *after* lunch, I think it was."

"If you like."

"It was all about Alan. He was lying on the grass on his back, quite still and straight, with his eyes shut, and his face was pale—he has looked pale and worried lately—and I kept thinking, would he look like that when he is dead? Such a hateful thought, wasn't it?"

"But just now you seemed anxious about my grandfather?"

"Yes; I don't know why, but not having been well, it seemed the most natural thing to fancy something might happen to him; but why should anything happen to any one? What geese we are, Rie!"

"We can't help these thoughts," said Rie. "I mean we can't help their coming, but we can get rid of them of course, by talking of something else. Tell me about the baby, Patty."

"The most restless, tempestuous of mortals. Lady Wyke is beginning to be seriously exercised in mind about him. I tell her education will do wonders, but she shakes her head over him."

Rie laughed.

"He is not like you, Patty."

"No; nor like Alan. Rie, I am not easy about Alan. What's the matter with him?"

"Why do you ask me?—surely you know him better than I do."

"Do you know? Have you the least idea what makes him so silent just now, so unusually quiet and unlike himself?"

"Wasn't he always quiet? I always thought him so."

"Rie, you are not answering me. Do you know

what is the matter with Alan? Look at me, and tell me."

"Patty, you are silly. I don't see that there is anything the matter with your brother. If you are uneasy about him, why don't you ask him what's the matter. Surely he would tell you. I never saw a brother and sister so fond of each other as you two are."

"Dear old Alan!" said Patty. "Yes, we are great friends, and we used to have no secrets from each other; but times change, and I shall never tease him for his confidence. Sometimes I think some girl has treated him badly. If so, I don't want to hear the story; I should feel inclined to murder her, I should hate her so!"

"Patty!"

"Yes, I should. You don't know me, Rie. Alan is my heart's core, as the Irish say. You have never had a brother, and I—why, I have never had any one else to love."

"Your old nurse,—Miss Judith!"

"Dear old Nan—ah, yes! how ungrateful I am! But she has been old, always—couldn't understand my small heartaches as Alan could."

"Patty, you are out and out melancholy to-day; I shall shake you."

"Do; I wish you would. Rie, how long do you think they'll be gone?"

"Who,—your brother and my grandfather? Didn't they say they'd be back about five?"

"So they did; but that's an age."

"Shall we go and look for Grannie and Miss Judith?"

"No; let's stay here; I like it. Oh, Rie, let me be dismal a bit. It's been so dull since you left the Lowes, and the last two or three days it has been positively

awful. Sir Andrew so queer, and Lady Wyke not knowing whether to be anxious or not, and Alan silent, and the baby squealing. It sounds cheerful, doesn't it?"

"You've forgotten to describe yourself, Patty. Shall I do it for you?"

"You can't. I've been as cross as two sticks, and all about this horrid girl that's tormenting Alan. I wish I knew who it is—who is it, Rie?"

"Why don't you ask him, or give up worrying about it?"

"Rie, I suppose there's no denying I'm partial to Alan, dear old boy; but of course you are not,—why should you be? Now tell me, what do you think of him? Isn't he the sort of man most girls would like? Good-looking, I know he is; good-tempered, every one will tell you; not especially clever perhaps, but sensible enough. What can the girl want more? Oh, I suspect she is a fashionable young woman, and wants more money than my poor boy can boast. What a horrid girl she must be!"

"How ridiculous you are, Patty! How do you know there's any girl in the case?"

"Rie, tell me, what do you think of Alan?"

This was too much. Rie tossed her head, pushed her hat back off her brow, and said, calmly—

"I don't know that I've ever seriously considered him."

Patty looked hard at her companion.

"Well," she said at last, "some girls wouldn't believe you, but I do. You don't give your mind to consider such commonplace things as lads, I know. The baby was more interesting to you when you were with us than either Alan or I. I felt it deeply, I can assure you."

"Don't talk nonsense, Patty."

"I always do, it's my mission in life ; mind you never have a worse. I discovered my vocation very early, and I have never wavered in my pursuit of it. You don't understand me,—never mind."

"I think I do," Rie answered. There were tears in her eyes, but Patty's clear blue ones were dry. "You've been always trying to cheer somebody all your life long."

"Something like it. Such a queer childhood it was, Rie. My mother I can't remember, but the two pale ladies, my step-mothers, who drifted as it were into our lives, who were always sick and ailing, weeping and dying, they often flit across my memory, and I think how I talked nonsense just to make them smile. And Alan, my own lad, why, it seems to me now as if I never talked anything else to him, like the man that brought the good news to Ghent ; 'clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good, just to keep him going'—Alan, I mean, not the horse."

"I used to call him 'that melancholy boy' when we played together," said Rie.

"Ah, Rie, but you little knew ! When we had our periodical storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, whatever you like to call them, and all the servants were dismissed, which happened almost every three months, if he couldn't get out of the way, the worst of the storm fell on Alan. He says now that there was generally some shadow of an excuse,—that he was cheeky. I never saw it, and I don't quite believe it. I always feared he would run away, and so he would if it had not been for me. Rie, you don't know what a lucky girl you are to have lived with people whom you could respect."

Rie was making the same mental comment on Patty's

story ; the latter was sitting with hands clasped on her knees, looking straight before her—apparently she did not expect any reply to her last remark, and Rie merely laid a caressing hand on hers by way of answer.

“Alan says it has not hurt him,” added Patty, as if thinking aloud ; “and I positively believe he tries to think he cares for Sir Andrew. The last few days since he has seemed so queer, so weak and shaky, Alan has actually called him father, a thing no one ever taught us to do, and it sounds so odd. I couldn’t do such a thing. Am I a brute, Rie ? He was never so hard on me as on Alan.”

“You felt it all the more that it was Alan and not you,” Rie replied ; “but forget it, Patty, if you can.”

“Yes—yes ; how stupid to talk of it ! It’s your fault, Rie ; you draw people on to talk of their woes by pretending you care to hear.” Then with resolute determination, throwing off the unusual sadness that had seized on her, she plunged into talk of other things—the baby’s christening, and the trip she was to take with Alan when that important event was over.

Rie had her little schemes too, quite equally lovely, she thought. Mr. Gilpin had some vague ideas that he might take a holiday in the autumn, and go to London and stay with Grannie. Rie’s eyes quite danced at the thought.

“What low tastes you have !” her friend remarked. “You are downright homesick for your dirty old friends in the slums.” And Rizpah laughed and did not deny the charge.

After a while Patty said—

“We ought to be going back to Mrs. Rae and Aunt Judith, they’ll be having tea ;” and they got up, and

with some parting regrets at leaving so fair a spot, sauntered back towards the house.

Miss Wyke had fallen in with some colonial visitors who were doing the Lakes, and she was acting guide to the beauties of Langdale. Mrs. Rae had produced a long worsted stocking, which was her holiday work, and was driving the needles along at a furious pace. The table was set for tea, and near it Mr. Gilpin was whiling away the time with a newspaper some days old. By and by Miss Wyke came in, and declaring she was not going to wait a minute longer for tea, rang the bell, and gave her orders.

"I don't believe that husband of yours would go far, Susannah," she said. "He and Alan are, I dare say, lying on the grass not a hundred yards distant; they'll make their appearance before we have done."

So the cakes and buttered scones were handed round, and the stocking and newspaper were laid aside, while Miss Wyke dispensed the tea and related her conversation with the transatlantic visitors.

"They talk of lakes a hundred miles long," she said with contempt; "there can't really be any beauty in such things. Size is the one thing they care about. But they seem to have an amazing faculty for picking up information, and a power of remembering which amazes me. They know the names of all the mountains far better than I do, and the heights and everything else about them. I asked them to come and have some tea, and they weren't sure if they wouldn't do Grasmere this evening. Patty, child, what's the matter? Have you scalded yourself? What are you doing? Don't upset the table." For Patty had suddenly put down her cup, and with an awe-struck cry had started up and hastened towards the window.

"What is it, Patty? What ails you, child?"

"Mr. Rae," gasped Patty. And at that moment a dusty, staggering old man came in sight, hurrying along at his utmost speed, yet, as was plainly to be seen, his legs shook under him, and all but refused to carry him any further. No longer hale and strong, as when they had seen him last, but white, haggard, and well-nigh spent with fatigue; more dead than alive, he tottered in among the anxious group that had rushed to the door to meet him.

"Mr. Rae alone! What is it? What has happened?" was on every lip; but in vain they questioned. His breath was gone, no words would come; the more he struggled to speak, the more his breath failed him.

"Let me,—let me—sit—down!" he gasped. But as they supported him to a seat, a mist seemed to gather before his eyes, and the death which he had never feared till this moment seemed close at hand.

But Patty was clasping his arm, imploring him to speak—"Only say, where is Alan?" Stephen Gilpin was before him, the same question in his anxious eyes; Miss Judith, white and trembling, and a crowd of men and women all waiting in awe-struck silence; while between them and him this cloud of deadly faintness grew thicker and thicker, his breath came with sobs, his senses were surely going. Was it death? No; he must live for ten minutes to tell the tale.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE FACE OF DEATH.

"Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is  
great,  
Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent Opener of the  
gate."  
TENNYSON.

WHEN they had started that afternoon on their mountain scramble Alan had said and thought, "We shall not go far, he's not fit for much uphill work, he will soon give in," but to his amazement the old parson strode away at a rapid pace, and seemed at first bent on keeping ahead of him. Used as he had been of late to lounge with Mr. Gilpin about the hills, taking their time and stopping constantly to admire and talk, Alan had not expected this energy and zeal, and as he watched the gaunt bony figure in front of him, he said to himself, "He won't keep that up long; he will get out of breath, and be glad to adopt a more moderate pace." But Alan did not understand the old man's joy of recovered strength, nor realize how the great heart in that worn body was rejoicing in the possession of renewed power for his great and loved work. The spurt which had sent him far up the hill lasted longer than his young companion had anticipated; but after a while he began to feel the need of company, and waited for Alan to come up.

Then they fell into a more deliberate pace, Alan remarking it was a bad plan to get out of breath at the



beginning of a climb ; and before long they were proceeding so quietly that it was possible to carry on a broken kind of conversation, now on the scenery and the path they were following, now on interests common to both—plans for the coming winter, schemes for the benefit of the toiling multitudes in John Rae's city parish, for lightening burdens, cheering sad hearts, letting the oppressed go free. Alan had many plans, the old parson many more. They talked little of these things except when alone, much talking was not necessary ; together they worked and toiled, fighting for the victims of vice, selfishness, and suffering, but silently, with no blare of trumpets, doing good as by stealth,—that was John Rae's way, and Alan followed in his steps. Even Patty knew but little of what she called Alan's low tastes, and the strong-minded Susannah was not always entrusted with the secret of her husband's doings ; she was inclined to think him at times too tender-hearted in his ways, and it must be confessed that he had little weaknesses which he was wise to keep to himself.

Much had Alan learned from him ; how he revered him it would not be easy to say. Something, and that not a little, the old man was wont to say he had learned from Alan. Mrs. Rae would open her eyes with profound astonishment at such a statement, but the old Vicar persisted.

"What have I learned from that boy, did you say, Susannah ? Well, in the first place he's not a boy. And what have I learned ? I have learned something which we old people are wont to forget, and that is what a bitter suffering lies in doubt, in real true honest doubt. We have, I suppose, forgotten how we came to believe, and we are apt to imagine that young people disbelieve on purpose. What did you say ? Young folks think it

the right thing to have doubts? Of course they do, many of them—shows they are not such credulous fools as their parents. But Alan Wyke is not one of these. Yes; I've seen the bitter pain of doubt, and I've given my sympathy, couldn't do much more. It's over now, the worst of it. His real life is begun. 'This is Life Eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' How do I know, did you say, Susannah? Has he told me? No, no; deeds, not words, for me. 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me.'"

Was it altogether true that Alan did not tell? Perhaps it was. It was his way to make others talk, and to be content to listen, and thus it fell out that during that afternoon's walk, it was the old man that seemed all life and energy, and the young man that was content to be silent.

After a weary bit of climbing, they sat down to rest and recover breath.

"Stiff work for an old worn-out hack," said the parson; "there's some life in the old dog yet, Alan," and he chuckled with delight at his own exploits.

"Don't do too much," urged Alan, "you are not used to it; be content with what you've done. Let's rest quietly here a while, and then saunter back to the others."

"No, no; you're lazy, Alan. In this air climbing is an absolute delight; if we had but time you would not get me back till we had reached the top."

"Then I'm glad we have not time; it would be madness for you to attempt it. What, must we go on?"

But nothing else would content the old man.

"Why didn't the girls come?" he said. "It would have done them good. Come, I won't be stopped. Remember,

I shall never do a mountain more ; you may go this tramp hundreds of times again, but I never," and he looked round at Alan with a radiant smile on his rugged old face.

But Alan could not smile ; he was growing seriously uneasy. Suppose the determined old man's strength should suddenly fail—and what was more likely ?—what should he do, alone with him so far from aid ? The thought made him determine to be obstinate.

"We really must not go any further," he said. "We promised to be back by five ; we have gone too far already ; they will be tired to death of waiting for us."

He had struck the right chord this time. To keep any one waiting merely for his pleasure, was impossible to the unselfish John Rae. He was quite ready to return immediately ; in fact, full of concern lest his want of thought should have been the cause of annoyance to others ; and eager to find short cuts that would bring them more speedily to the bottom of the hill.

"You see it was the thought of my last mountain ramble," he ~~said~~, ~~apologetically~~. "I shall not go out pleasure-seeking again. No, no, you won't persuade me ; I'll stick to my post as a Briton should ; and when I go, God grant I may find some tough work waiting me in the world beyond. Hey, what ?"

"More work ? Not rest ?"

"Rest !—oh, yes ; rest from many things,—rest from self with its ugly ways, rest from this failing body, rest from doubt, rest from sights that pain and words that break one's heart. But look, Alan, at that poor wee lamb. How did it get there, do you think, and where's its mother ?"

"Up above, some way off—the lamb will find its

way to her no doubt. What, you are not going to fetch it?"

"Poor wee thing! Suppose it never reaches its mother. How piteously they are calling to each other! Alan, if I leave it there, it will haunt my dreams to-night."

"Oh, it will be all right, never fear. Nay, if the lamb must be fetched, let me go."

But he was too late. The active old man was already slipping and scrambling down the rough bit of rocky ground to the point where the lamb was standing in its distress. He handed the little creature up to Alan, who watched it skip away to its dam, and then turned to help his old friend back into the path again; but to return was not so easy as the descent had been, the face of the rock was steep, and the moss in many places was short and slippery.

"Take care," shouted Alan, "you will slip backwards. Wait a minute, I will come and help you; a shove behind is what you need." He was down beside his friend in a moment; a look at the old man's face told him that the much boasted strength was fast failing him. "You should have let the lamb shift for itself," he said. "Now take breath, clutch the edge of that rock; hold fast, don't let go for your life, or we shall go down together, and may roll further than is pleasant. Now then, will you try?"

Alan was strong and muscular, but the tall, heavy old man had suddenly grown feeble. Pushing him behind, guiding him carefully, almost lifting him, in fact, the task was by no means an easy one. He slipped and stumbled, struggled and fell, regained his footing, and at last by a mighty effort scrambled back to the top, and to the spot whence he had started in pursuit of the lamb.

Sitting down to regain his breath and look around him, he waited for Alan, who was of course just behind him. But no Alan appeared. Was he trying to find an easier path back than up that slippery rock among those loose stones? He looked around and down the hillside again, still no Alan. He called,—no reply. Again. Yes, Alan's voice, but how far off it sounded! Where could he be? The old man's sight was not as good as once it had been, yet surely, surely it was not deceiving him now. Far down below, among the rough stones, the bracken, and the rocks, something was lying; and the voice—Alan's—he knew, came from thence.

Had that last effort with which his young friend had almost lifted him up that steep bit of rock, cost the lad his life? Oh, surely not. He must have rolled, not fallen far. "Alan!" he shouted, and how tremulous was that deep voice,—“Alan, what has happened? Are you much hurt? Speak, if you can.”

The answer came feebly back, he could scarcely hear it, yet no other sound broke the silence of the mountain-side, except that of the distant streams making their way down the bosom of the hills, and the faint bleating of the sheep as they crept about the rocks. Yet there was an answer, and the first great dread of John Rae's heart was laid to rest.

“My feet went away from under me, I rolled,” Alan said. “Yes, I'm hurt, but not badly.” He had raised his head, he was lying on his face, and then he tried to rise, but sank down again, and lay still.

“I'll come down,” shouted the old man, but these words seemed to put life into Alan; he raised his head again, and exercised his utmost strength to shout—

“Don't, don't; go back as fast as you can and send

somebody here ; I can't walk." Then his head drooped again, he lay still and said no more.

The kind-hearted old man stood still in despair. "I can't leave you," he said ; "hadn't I better come down ?"

No answer came.

"Alan, dear fellow, tell me where you are hurt ?" Still no reply. "I'll do as he said," resolved John Rae. "God give me strength. Alan," once more he shouted, "I'm going ; I'll not be long away—and God is with you." Was there an answer ? No ; only the mountains echoed back the words, "God is with you." Then he started off as fast as his strength would permit, but alas ! not with the alertness and agility which some hours back had carried him along that path so blithely. He went blindly forward, for great tears were filling his dim eyes, and a horrible dread had overwhelmed him. No word had come back to his last cry down the hill ; might not that bright young life even now have fled ?

Away he sped ; and silence settled down upon the mountain-side. And Alan lay still. He knew not exactly what had befallen him ; he only knew that to move was agony, and so he lay quite still just as he had fallen for some time after he was aware that he was quite alone. But at last he said to himself, "This is folly, I must find out what has happened," and slowly he began to raise himself, and to consider which limbs were uninjured. "I have not broken my back, nor seriously damaged my head, that's a blessing," he thought. Then by degrees he contrived to sit up ; it was a relief to think that no one was there to hear the groans it cost him, or to watch his agony. A racking pain across his chest, and in one leg and foot, told him that there at least he had sustained some serious injury, that it was utterly impossible for him to drag himself many yards ; that being the case, it

was surely best to stay where he was, since if any one came to look for him, his only chance of being found was in remaining where Mr. Rae had left him.

Stay and be patient, for at the best the time must be long before help would come. He found his watch with some difficulty, but that too had suffered from the fall, and had stopped at the moment of the accident. Well, it did not matter much, he must keep on reminding himself that the time would seem long,—how could it be otherwise? Then the pain overpowered him for a time, and he could think of nothing else. Did he faint, or did he sleep? Something of the kind must have happened, but Alan knew not which. The sun was getting lower in the heavens, the great heat was passing, and in a dreamy way he began to wonder whether it would be very cold if he had to pass the night on the hill-side. Once or twice he thought with longing of the tea that was to be kept for him; how good it would have been, with Patty's laugh in his ears, and Rie's beautiful eyes to watch! Then a change came over his spirit. Was it altogether probable that Mr. Rae would be able so exactly to describe where he lay, that any one who came to search might find him? Most certainly, if Mr. Rae ever got back at all, which Alan felt was doubtful, he would be too dead beat to act the part of guide. But these thoughts he put from him. No need to despair yet awhile; there were still some hours of daylight, and a night on the mountain-side, if it did not turn very cold, had no terrors for him.

Then he thought of Patty; he had always thought of Patty first all his life long, and he could not help vexing himself to think how she would fret. Of Rizpah he would not allow himself to think; he would have liked to fancy that she would care a little—just a little—for his mishap,

not as she would for that of any acquaintance, but just a little more. He hoped she would never hear how he came to fall; but set it down merely to his own awkwardness.

By and by he grew faint or dreamy; sleep he would not so long as daylight lasted and there was a chance of any one coming to his aid, nor did the pain give him much chance of real slumber, but he found it hard to think; and at last he resolved that he would try another posture and rouse himself lest unconsciousness should come upon him. So he sat up, and by doing so brought on a fresh access of pain. He was wide-awake once more, and began to ask himself what, if the worst came to the worst, and no help arrived, would be his plight?

He thought of Falconer, and how he had always expected to die alone: he recalled all the incidents of that quiet passing away, and remembered how he had spoken of a leap in the dark. He seemed to see again his dying hands stretched out to welcome the unseen but present Deliverer, and he thought, "Perhaps this silent hill-side is as good a place to die as any other." To die! With a strange sort of fascination he repeated those words, wondering if indeed the time he had so often thought of had really come. It had seemed far enough away that morning, when he and Patty had started on their day's expedition, but Patty had said more than once with a kind of shudder, "Something is going to happen to-day, Alan,—what is it?" He had laughed at her, such forebodings were so unlike Patty. Was it really so? Was he going to die? Had he at last overtaken that grim Shade that had always seemed to be hovering round his path, stumbled suddenly upon it, and met it face to face? Had it been lurking for him here this bright day on the glorious rocky heights, hiding



behind a rock, to dart out and seize him when least expecting? Is this the end?—is this the end?

"Hardly likely," he thought. "This horrid pain does not necessarily prove I am badly hurt, and they will come and look for me, if the old man does not kill himself by rushing home full speed. If?—yes, if? But why not look the Thing in the Face. If this does mean Death to me, what then?" He opened his eyes and looked around, faintly, wearily, for the pain was sore. How beautiful it was, this world around him! Could it be that he was looking his last on all its glories? If so, what then? He thought of many little plans for the future; he would have liked to finish them, and see them carried out; but after all, what did it matter? "Some day it will come, it must come—why not now? Death is not now what once I thought. Dark as it looks, its Face is towards the Light. No; it is not death, since Christ has died. The sun is behind that black cloud, it will break forth again, and so shall I. 'Into Thy hand, O Father, I commend my spirit.'"

And thus the hours passed. The sun sank, and the after-glory of that beautiful day faded away, till the yellow and the soft green tints had died into the cool evening grey, and the shades of night drew on. A few stars came out, and the air grew cool; once or twice a faint rustle close at hand roused Alan from his state of semi-consciousness to a more vivid sense of his pain; but the sound died away, and he knew that it was caused only by some restless sheep moving about in the dark. Once a stone came rolling down the hill-side, and fell with some force against his injured foot; probably the same creature had disturbed it and set it rolling. How long those hours seemed! But when darkness at length settled down on the scene, and even the outlines of the

hills and rocks ceased to be visible, Alan gave up listening for distant sounds, and tried to sleep. But the bed was hard, and the night air was cool. Sometimes he dozed, then woke moaning and shivering, and wondered whether it were not better to stay awake than sleep and dream. Just at the darkest hour of the night a sharp shower of rain fell, and Alan knew, but did not greatly care, that he was being drenched as he lay. A numbness was stealing over his senses. Yesterday had vanished into the far distance ; even the familiar faces and scenes of his past life seemed fading away, and ceasing to have a place in his memory. The weary pain was still there, but even that did not seem to matter much. It would pass as everything else was passing from him, slipping, fading away in the great mist which seemed to wrap him round and take him in.

How still he lay,—how quiet ! The first faint light of dawn is struggling with the heavy curtain of darkness that clothes those mountain-tops, yet he moves not ; far away down in the valley an early waking cock sends forth a cheery greeting to the coming day. Yet Alan hears no sound. The mists begin to move from one giant peak to another, the sleepy sheep stir, and the plovers utter their piteous cry, but that quiet figure lies still and stirs not. A wandering sheep with a tiny lamb by her side stands beside him, and wonders much what brought him there ; but it is no concern of hers, and slowly she wanders on to find a trickling stream to quench her thirst, and the lamb skips over the prostrate form, but Alan knows nothing of it. A great white cloud comes sailing along the mountain-face, a soft white sheet of mist ; it covers up the sleeper in its damp chill folds ; but he knows nothing, cares nothing, and the cloud too speeds on its way, and by and by a broader band of

light spreads across the heavens, and the first gleams of sunlight illumine the rocky points which stand up hard and cold against the sky. Some slanting beams play lovingly around the quiet face, finding out the lines of pain and weariness on the pale brow, and touching the drops of dew on hair and face with sparkles of rainbow light ; but still he sleeps.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A LONG NIGHT'S WATCH.

"Her tears fell with the dews at even ;  
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried ;  
She could not look on the sweet heaven  
Either at morn or eventide."—TENNYSON.

"RIE! Rie!"

The words were uttered in a carefully muffled tone by Mrs. Rae, standing half-way down the staircase of the house where Miss Wyke was staying, in the middle of the terrible night which followed the accident on the mountain ; and as she spoke Rie came out of the little sitting-room at the foot of the stairs and looked up at her.

"How is he?" she said in the same cautious tone.

"Better ; he has slept a little, but he wants your uncle. Has he come in?"

"He came in an hour ago, and brought Patty. She is there." Rie moved her hand towards the room she had just left. "What does grandfather want?"

"He seems to think he told them all wrong, he didn't know what he was saying ; he fancies he sent them in quite a wrong direction. Where is your uncle? How is Patty?"

Rie shook her head. "She doesn't speak," she answered. "Uncle is outside talking to the men ; they will go out again as soon as there is any light."

"Find him and send him up-stairs,"

This was not easy, but Rie obeyed, and then went back to Patty. The girl had been brought back by Mr. Gilpin when the coming on of darkness made all search hopeless, and was now lying spent and apparently half paralyzed with grief on the little couch where they had laid her. Miss Judith was sitting by her. She had loosened the girl's dress, taken off her boots, and was bathing her tired and bruised feet.

"What is it, Rie?"

It was the first time she had spoken since she had come in: the voice was hard and unnatural, the large blue eyes that were fixed on Rie with such a hungry gaze were tearless and hopeless; but it was a relief to hear her speak, and Rie went to her eagerly, and repeated what Mrs. Rae had said.

Patty listened, and then laid her head back with something like a groan.

"Then we have been wasting all this time, and he may be dying for want of help," she said bitterly. "Oh, will it ever be daylight!"

"Patty," said Miss Judith decidedly, "if you mean to go out on the hills again as soon as it is light, you must rest now, and try to sleep, otherwise it will be perfectly impossible. Sleep, and the morning will soon be here."

"Sleep, Aunt Judith! how can I?"

Nevertheless she laid her head down and closed her eyes, and the two sitting by scarcely dared to move, lest, if she should chance to doze, they might disturb her. They had said all there was to be said in the way of wonder, lamentation, and conjecture, and a great silence of suspense had fallen upon them. Each had her own thoughts. Miss Wyke's were chiefly directed to Patty. What would become of the girl if this one brother in

whom she so delighted were lost to her, she found it impossible to imagine. Rie's thoughts were running in a different groove ; and while she hovered round Patty, lavishing on her all the care and sympathy that her loving heart could suggest, one thought was ever uppermost in her mind, filling her eyes with tears, and choking her voice whenever she tried to speak, the self-reproachful thought—"How was it that I never knew how I loved him ?"

Over and over again she asked herself the question, as that long night wore away. Was ever night so long ? was ever night so dark ? Yet it was but a summer night after all, and its hours were but few.

By and by the door softly opened, and Mr. Gilpin's face appeared. Patty was on her feet in a moment.

"I promised," he said, "else I would not have come. Can you not trust us, Miss Patty, to leave nothing undone that may be done, and stay quietly here with your aunt ?"

"No," she said. "I am coming with you. Are you ready ?"

"It is scarcely light enough to see our way ; but you must take some food before starting—I have some coffee here."

"I cannot," she said.

"Then I will *not* take you," he replied. "It would be madness. You were so sensible last night, Miss Patty, but if you go out faint for want of food, what help will you be ? Rie, what are *you* doing ?"

"I am coming too—to take care of Patty," Rie replied. "Patty, we will have some coffee, and eat something, or we shall be more trouble than good."

"I cannot," Patty persisted ; but nevertheless she yielded, took the cup offered her, and tried to eat.

"Take food for him," she said.

"Of course, of course ; and brandy," said Miss Wyke. "Who are going with you, Mr. Gilpin ?"

He named four men, natives of the place, and some gentlemen visitors. "They are very kind," he said.

"I can bear it better thus. To stay still and do nothing is maddening," Patty said after they had walked some distance in the early dawn. "Rie, I am growing stupid, my head is in a maze ; I cannot think at all."

"Don't try," answered Rie. "Just think about picking your way so as not to stumble, and nothing else."

Then they went on in silence. The men talked among themselves about this path and that, what was likely and what was unlikely ; questioned Mr. Gilpin about what the old parson had said ; wondered how he could have sent them so utterly wrong the night before. But Patty seemed to take no notice. Rie heard them say, "Better try yon path ; it might be a bit roundabout, but if so be he'd fallen some way, it would be easiest so and pleasantest for the ladies ;" and she begged them not to think of her and Patty, but by all means to choose the shortest way. But Patty walked as in a dream. Suddenly she turned on Rie almost fiercely.

"Why did you come ? I did not want you. You do not care for him ; it will be nothing to you if he is dead. Why did you come ?"

"To be with you, Patty. But do not think of death, he is not dead."

"I think he is," said Patty ; "and I shall see him just as I fancied him yesterday, cold and dead, and *you* will not care. Rie, *you* are the girl I was talking about yesterday. Yes, you will not care."

"Patty dear, don't talk so strangely. I *shall* care—oh ! so much, if—but he is not dead."

"Aunt Judy will care, Mr. Gilpin will care, Mr. Rae, yes, they will all care ; but it will be all the same to you, Rie ; he is nothing to you, nothing at all."

"Patty, don't."

"No, I won't. Why should I reproach you ? You couldn't love him ; it is not your fault. But if you had cared for him he would have stayed with you yesterday, and never gone up that horrid mountain at all."

"He went to please my grandfather."

"Yes ; and what did Mr. Rae do ?—something mad, you may be sure. Alan has climbed mountains all his life and never fallen before. Oh, Rie, I am mad ; I have awful thoughts."

"Don't think at all, Patty, or speak to God and tell Him all."

Patty was silent ; the passion of grief and despair had vented itself, and she was calmer. The men watched her wonderingly.

"How light she goes up the hill, and she must be terrible tired, out half the night, and now abroad again, and her shoes well-nigh worn off her feet with these rough stones ; but she never looks behind, but just goes right on. They be terrible fond of each other, they two."

Then a silence fell on the party. Each knew without any need to tell the others that they must begin to search in earnest, even though the light was still but faint, for they could not now be far from the spot which the old man had described, when, having collected his senses, he had been able to think over the matter. Certain landmarks he had noted on his way home, and these he had done his best to describe : a tiny walled-in enclosure where some sheep had been penned, this they had passed ; certain great black crags which hung over the rough ground where Alan had fallen, but what had



looked black in the glare of the afternoon sun might be grey and soft now in the faint light of dawn ; some stunted firs scattered here and there among the slabs of stone. Dear, dear, there were many such ; what did they tell ? Never mind. " Mr. Gilpin, sir, we must just look everywhere. Miss Wyke must keep up her heart, we'll find him sure enough. Pity the old gentleman could not come with us, then 'twould have been plain-sailing, and no difficulty at all."

" Oh, what's the use of wishing this and that," groaned Patty, as she stumbled on, each moment growing whiter and more desperate. Once she yielded to Rie's entreaties and sat down for a minute, but that was just because she could not go a step further ; no sooner had she recovered her breath than she was up and off again.

" Must be somewhere near here," one of the men remarked, " that is, if t' old man knew what he was saying ; but these London-bred fellows call things by such queer outlandish names, there's no being even with them. Look sharp among the rocks and bracken." And up and down the rough hill-side they wandered, with many a shout that woke the echoes and scared the birds and mountain sheep in their solitude, but brought no cheering cry in answer to guide them on their way. But they were patient souls those good Langdale men. " Can't expect to find him in a hurry, miss," they said as they gazed at the face that grew ever whiter and more woe-struck in its despair ; and then in low tones aside they told tales that made Rie's blood run cold. But Patty seemed to have ears and thought for nothing that they said.

" Tell us again what the old gent said, every word," said one of the men, and the others gathered round to listen. " Surely it can't be far from here ; we passed that bit of a cairn he spoke of five minutes ago."

"Patty, Patty, what is it?" cried Rie, for the girl had started suddenly forward. "Oh! 'stop! Where are you going?"

"Down here. See, see!" and she pointed where far below a hat was lying among some gorse and heather. "Don't hold me, Rie; let go! let go!"

But others beside Patty had seen, and with nimble feet and hands were scrambling down among the loose stones and broken slabs of rock towards the spot where the hat was lying. Two of the men helped Patty, as with wide-open terrified eyes she was searching all the hill-side for the brother whom she longed yet almost dreaded to find.

"We oughtn't to have let her come," they said to each other. "Miss Wyke, sit down here till we find him, and bring you to him."

"No, no," she said, and stumbled on.

"It will, maybe, be terrible," murmured one of the rough men.

"It will go near to kill her," said another. But no one dared to hinder her, and on she went. Only with tender care they held her up, disentangling her skirts as they caught on the sharp edges of rocks, and finding easy foothold for her where the way was steep.

Suddenly a cry broke from her white lips, and breaking from those who held her up with a sudden scrambling rush, her search came to an end. Under the shadow of that dark grey rock, lying just as she had pictured him all through the long hours of that awful night, white and still and quiet, Patty found her brother. And the others, following her close, found her stretched on the ground beside him, bending over him, calling him by name, trying to raise his head and rest it on her arm, and one rough man stood back and wept.

One by one they reached the ledge where Alan lay, Rie and Stephen Gilpin last. They had found an easier path, for Rie knew nothing of such rough ground, and the parson was not so active as in days gone by. Each as they reached the spot stood still and gazed, as loath to speak the thoughts which were in every heart, and for a minute all were silent. Then Rie drew closer; timidly she pressed to Patty's side, until her cheek touched the girl's face; then she took one limp languid hand in hers, and Patty ceased her piteous moaning cry, and looked at her.

How cold that hand felt! Rie shuddered, and dared not meet that questioning gaze of Patty's face.

"Come," said one of the gentlemen, pressing forward, "don't let's lose time, young ladies, let's get him away home as fast as we can; but first the brandy—who has it?" And he pushed Patty gently aside, and kneeling down lifted Alan's head upon his arm and put the flask to his lips; while Mr. Gilpin, drawing nearer, unfastened the collar, and laid his hand on Alan's heart.

The two men looked at each other. "Yes, yes," the former said, "he swallowed some of it; try again, a little more. Now, Miss Wyke, you must let us move him," for Patty was again beside him, pressing vehement kisses on lips and brow and cheek, calling him, and urging him to speak to her, breaking out ever and anon into passionate wailing, then choking down her tears, and relapsing into calm despair.

"Better carry him right away to the house," said one of the Langdale men; "can't do nought for him here. Miss Wyke, let's get hold of him, if you please."

"Yes, Patty, let them," urged Rie; "he is cold and wet. Oh, if we can get him to the house and warm him, he will come to himself, you will see."

"He is dying," said Patty; "if they move him he will die at once, I know he will."

"No, no," said Stephen Gilpin, "it is not as bad as that, and he must be moved. Miss Wyke, he has no chance lying here."

Then Patty got up from the ground, hopelessly, but without further objection, and with great care and tenderness Alan was raised, and the difficult task of conveying him home was attempted.

"Shall we go on before and see about a bed being prepared?" suggested Rie, ever eager to be doing something; but Patty would not be persuaded to leave her brother's side.

"He may die any moment," she said piteously. "Oh, if I could only carry him; I know they hurt him, they must, stumbling and shaking him in that way," and her mournful eyes looked reproachfully on the kind-hearted fellows who were doing their very utmost to handle their burden so as to cause him the least possible suffering.

"He is not conscious," said Mr. Gilpin; "perhaps it is just as well."

"Can't be helped shaking him a bit, miss; but see, he's coming to himself," for Alan moaned and moved, and opened his eyes more than once.

It was indeed no easy task—the stones slipped from beneath the men's feet, they staggered beneath the weight of their burden, and many a time had to lay him down. Before long Patty found relief to her over-wrought feelings in tears. The long suspense was over, and yet she dared not hope; she, the ever bright and cheery Patty, could not believe that such moans could mean anything but that her brother's hurts were mortal.

Mr. Gilpin was walking by her side, and drawing near

at sight of her tears, took her hand and drew it through his arm, saying kindly—

“Don’t fret too much ; I have hopes of him, my dear.”

Such simple, kindly words. Patty blessed him in her heart. No making light of her fears, no random assurance that there was nothing much amiss, just the honest truth and nothing more.

“You are utterly done up ; lean on me ; we shall have to carry you before long.” So he talked, and by degrees she found voice to answer him. “Moans like those don’t always mean so very much,” he said. “They think there’s a broken bone, Miss Patty, and the shaking he is getting is enough to make him groan, but broken bones can be mended, you know.”

“I can’t hope,” she said.

“That’s because you are overdone ; you must go to bed and rest, and things will look brighter. God is good, Miss Patty.”

So they trudged on, and so from time to time he threw in just the cheery word she wanted to keep her going. Once or twice he looked at Rie with a puzzled face ; the girl was more unnerved than he had expected ; she who had seen suffering and death in various forms, had shrunk back more than once when urged to look at Alan Wyke, about whose unconscious face there was nothing ghastly or painful. Was this depth of feeling nothing but grief for her friend and sympathy with Patty ?

Stephen Gilpin was perplexed, and hoped that during all the friendly intercourse that had been going forward with the brother and sister, this little girl of his had not been foolish enough to lose her heart to handsome Alan Wyke. He had heard of girls doing such silly things ; but his little Rie was not like other girls, and he had

thought she held her feelings in such good order, that no such catastrophe was to be apprehended. Mrs. Rae had said, "Rizpah has no attractions ; a good, useful girl, but she will never marry," and Mrs. Rae had somehow assumed so much the *rôle* of a prophetess, that he had accepted this prediction as a matter of course, and believed it fully. It would be a pity if the girl had brought this trouble on herself ; it would lower her in his opinion, since of course high-minded girls never fell in love until they were bidden to do so by those who had a right to arrange such little matters for them.

Alan was still only half conscious when he was brought into the house where Miss Wyke was staying and put to bed. Then there was much running hither and thither to find a doctor, the nearest having gone away for a few days' holiday, and the others being far to seek.

"One would need have patience in these parts," said Miss Judith, whose London experience had put her out of conceit of many country ways. She had been seriously considering during the last few hours whether mountains are not altogether an unnecessary addition to life's anxieties, and the difficulty of finding a doctor put the finishing touch to her exasperation. "Isn't there even a bone-setter to be had?"

"We don't know whether there are any bones to set," said Mr. Gilpin. And then, to the relief of all present, Alan suddenly opened his eyes and inquired if they were talking about him.

Patty was by his side in an instant.

"Alan, dear old boy, do you know me?"

He smiled faintly. "Don't worry about me, Patty," he said. "I'm done up, that's all ; and my leg is broken, I think. Can't they get the doctor?"

"He's away ; they've sent to Grasmere," said Miss Judith, bending over her nephew. "It's a benighted place this is. Well, nought behoves like patience."

"Yes," said Alan wearily—he had told himself so a good many times that night—"I can wait."

Then Rie came creeping to the bedside with a cup of hot soup on a little tray.

"Patty," she said, "try and make him take it."

Patty obeyed, but Alan's eyes followed Rie as she moved across the room. The girl would not look at him. Again Stephen Gilpin was puzzled, and knew not what to think.

The doctor came at last, on the wings of the wind, as he assured them ; but every one's patience was well-nigh exhausted before the said wind dropped him at the door. He wanted to hear all about the accident, but as nobody knew about it except Alan, who told him that he could not remember much about it, and was too weary and weak to be questioned, the doctor proceeded to examine him, and to put him, as Patty declared, to much needless torture.

"Ankle dislocated, leg broken, much wrenched and bruised. Pain in the chest ? Ah, yes, two or three ribs broken, perhaps some internal injuries—can't say yet, Mr. Gilpin. Oh, might have been worse ; yes, of course, might have broken his neck."

"Not as I fell," said Alan faintly. "Patty, go away, and Miss Rae too. Why should you stay—you are tired and done up."

But Patty shook her head, and it was not till Alan declared he would have nothing done till she had gone, that she could be induced to leave the room.

Then it was only to content him that she let Rie almost drag her from his side. She would go no further

than the door, but seated herself at the foot of the stairs, listening to every sound within the room, now shuddering when she heard a groan, now bitterly wondering whether the doctor was going to stay for ever.

But when at last he went away, with the consoling remark that there might be internal injuries of a very serious nature, but that he saw no signs of any such thing, she was inclined to think that he ought to have stayed longer.

"Might be! Why doesn't he find out if there are any?" she said impatiently. And on Rie's assurance that he only said it to be on the safe side, lest any one should say afterwards he had made too light of the case, she was instantly convinced that Rie thought badly of her brother, and she must and would know why.

Poor Patty, her intense anxiety seemed to have changed her whole nature; and when the carriage from the Lowes drove up with her father and stepmother,—the one fuming and fussing, and the other full of real and affectionate anxiety,—the poor girl seemed nearly beside herself.

"Aunt Judy," she said, "keep him away from Alan; he will kill him, you know he will; and if he wants me, tell him I have gone to lie down," and she fled up-stairs.

Miss Judith had been much shaken by the suspense and anguish she had gone through, but she rose to the occasion, and Sir Andrew's querulous demand for a full and particular account of the whole of this "most insane proceeding" was met by a very brief summary of facts. Alan had slipped and fallen several yards, had broken a bone in his leg, and sustained other injuries, but they hoped he would do well.

"Then what has all this to-do been about?" Sir Andrew pursued. "Patty is at the bottom of it; that



girl is always getting up panics. Where is she? Send her here, Judith."

But Miss Judith had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

"Patty's gone to bed," she said; "she was up all night, and out on the hills for hours. She is worn out."

"Gone to bed, and in broad daylight! But she must come home. Does she think I am going to pay hotel bills for her because she chooses to run about the hills and knock herself up? Hester, my dear——" But Lady Wyke had escaped at the beginning of the argument, and had found her way to Patty's room, where her gentle and earnest sympathy set Patty off crying and did the girl good.

"Alan may pay his own bills," Sir Andrew went on.

"No doubt he will," replied Miss Wyke.

"And all the expense of messengers flying about the country because a sheep knocked him down," went on the baronet, whose own misfortune was ever present to his mind. "I mean because he's broken his leg. Does he really think, Judith, that no one ever broke his leg before?"

"I haven't asked him: but as he sent no messengers, I don't suppose he'll pay them. And as for Patty's hotel bill——"

"I tell you Patty must come home."

"Patty will stay here till her brother can be moved. Now, Andrew, that matter is settled. I'm sorry you can't see Alan, but the doctor has left strict orders he was not to be disturbed, but try to sleep."

"Sleep, of course he'll sleep; never was such a fellow for sleep as Alan—used to sleep the clock round when he was a boy. But I must see him, and let him know what I think of this escapade. Where is he?"

"That you can do at your leisure ; at present Alan is to sleep."

"Where is he ?"

Miss Wyke made no reply to this inquiry, but calmly remarked—

"Mr. Gilpin is with him. If Alan sleeps I dare say he'll do the same—he must be pretty well tired out."

"With all this excitement and commotion, no wonder. Gilpin is getting old. Never was such a fellow as Alan for making a fuss ; and he has only broken his leg, you say."

"Some ribs too, I fancy."

"Oh, that doesn't matter ; Lady Wyke was sure he must be killed, but I knew better. Such a nervous creature she is, Judith ; and between ourselves, I fear——" And then he started on one of his eternal lamentations over the burden of house-keeping expenses, the wastefulness of servants, &c., &c., to the monotonous sound of which Miss Judith soon found herself nodding, for she too was tired and sleepy, and Sir Andrew's voice had lost something of its rasping harshness, and had grown weak and thin of late. Once or twice she roused herself to say "Nonsense," and to wonder how long he had been talking, and whether Lady Wyke would ever come back and carry him off ; but she was so sorry for the poor wife that she could not find it in her heart to put an end to the brief rest she had secured from his wearisome talk.

"As long as he lets these poor children alone that is all that matters," she thought. "Plague them he shan't. How Hester bears it is past my comprehension. But Alan was right, he's not quite up to the mark to-day. I wonder what did happen between him and the sheep."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### NOT A RICH MAN'S WIFE.

"O we will walk this world  
Yoked in all exercise of noble end,  
And so thro' those dark gates across the wild  
That no man knows."—TENNYSON.

THERE was a gentle tap at the door of Alan's room that evening, and Patty, who was keeping guard there, rose, and cautiously opening it, found Rizpah standing without, who on seeing her friend drew back farther into the corridor, signing to Patty to come to her.

"I wanted to tell you that we are going now, grandfather, Grannie, and I," she said. "I have been hoping you would come out that I might say good-bye, but they cannot wait any longer, so I was forced to knock. I hope I did not disturb him."

"You are going?" said Patty. "Well, I suppose it is better, there is not room for all of us; but you might have shared this room they have given me, Rie—that is, if you wished to stay," and the two girls looked into each other's eyes, and read there each other's secrets.

Rie read, "After all, I believe you want to stay." Patty was convinced that those large, lustrous eyes, that quailed before hers, said, "Yes, indeed, I would give worlds to stay." But the lips were guarded in their utterances, and all Rie replied was, "I should love to be with you, Patty, but Grannie thinks I should go home with her, and of course it is best."

"And then?" said Patty.

Rie looked surprised. "Oh, we shall come over in a day or two," she said. "We shall want to know all about—I mean everything that happens. I am so glad the doctor is satisfied this afternoon."

"And then you will go back to your parish work, your housekeeping, your hens, and your bees just as before, and be quite contented, Rie, will you?"

"I suppose so, I hope so—what do you mean, Patty?"

"I don't believe it," said Patty. "Rie, come here for a minute, come up-stairs to my room—yes, you must, your Grannie can wait a minute. Now tell me, if Alan talks to me about you, and I dare say he will, what am I to say?"

"He won't—why should he? Patty, don't tease me. Say anything you like, but let me go, Grannie is calling," and she tore herself from Patty's grasp, and ran down-stairs, stopping for one minute to make her adieux to Miss Judith, with very flushed cheeks and quivering lips.

"I'll go right away from here," she said to herself, as she jumped into the wagonette that was in waiting at the door. "I will not stay, it is wrong. If he cares for me it is wrong; and if he doesn't, and I care for him, it is worse still. I must get Grannie to let me go back to London with her. But how can I manage it?—what will she say?"

But the more she thought about the matter, the more fixed did this determination grow, and much to her surprise—was it altogether to her satisfaction?—she found that her grandparents were inclined to accede to her request. They thought it might be better if she went back with them, and stayed till Mr. Gilpin came up in the autumn, and then she could return with

him ; and as they assigned no reason for this conviction, Rie began to wonder what their thoughts could be. Did they think she had failed in her efforts to make her uncle happy ?—or did they see in her an inability to adapt herself to the quiet country life to which they had once thought duty called her ? Both ideas were humiliating, and Rizpah's mind was not at rest. Had she known what a solemn conclave had sat to consider her fate, she would have been beside herself with vexation.

"There's something wrong with the child," Mrs. Rae had said.

"Love," interjected her husband.

"Nonsense ; you're always thinking about love," replied his wife—"what is it, Stephen ?" Whereupon Mr. Gilpin was drawn into confessing that the thought had occurred to him, that perhaps the child was becoming enamoured of her old playfellow, Alan Wyke.

"He comes and goes with us in such a friendly fashion that it may have stolen upon her unawares," said the romantic old bachelor ; but Mrs. Rae would listen to no such suggestion, and when the two gentlemen were inclined politely to maintain their own opinion, she burst upon them triumphantly with the challenge—

"Well, at any rate you don't imagine he's in love with her," which drew from them the embarrassed admission that they certainly did not think it likely.

"Then I say," persisted Mrs. Rae, "that I don't believe Rie has ever had such an idea in her life, and surely I ought to know. Why, the child has always been used to the society of men, and if she had been inclined to fall in love, shouldn't I have seen something of it ? There was that last curate Mr. Rae had, Stephen, he was always about the Vicarage ; and the one before, who stammered so frightfully ; and the young fellow who came to help at

Christmas time,—what was his name?—you remember him, John, he always looked as if he had outgrown his clothes. Well, Rie never fell in love—how I hate that expression!—with any of them, why should she be so perverse as to give her heart unsought to Alan Wyke?”

“Why, my dear, the truth is, these young men you mention were not specially attractive, though, as I always told him, Spence might have got over that stammer if he had tried, and Lowe might have had his clothes made to fit. But Alan has no stammer, and his clothes have a singular trick of fitting particularly well; perhaps Rie may have noticed these points more than you imagine.”

“Rie is not frivolous,” said Mrs. Rae, curtly; but though apparently unconvinced, this conversation had made her sufficiently uneasy to be ready to fall in with the proposal made by her husband that Rie should go back with them to London for a visit of some length. “And when Alan is well enough to go to London, she can return with Stephen to the north,” the good lady decided; and she tried to persuade herself that she saw nothing but satisfaction in Rie's face when this plan was disclosed to her.

And Rie, what of her? “It is very strange,” said the girl to herself, “that when I have obtained just what I wanted, I begin to wish something else would happen. I should have liked to stay just a little while longer, so as to see Patty quite happy again. How she does adore her brother! It must be nice to have a brother. Grandfather seems quite sure that the doctor thinks he will get quite well again; but it will be some time yet, I think. Well, it will certainly be better for me to go away just now, and perhaps, after all, I may be able to carry out some of my pet schemes. Sometimes I am afraid I don't care for them as much as I did. Perhaps I have

grown lazy in this idle life here. I wonder how my old courts will look after the paths across the hills, and the woods and meadows here." And strange as it may seem, Rie found herself reckoning regretfully the days that yet remained to her ere she once more plunged into the busy life of the great city ; and she grew so pensive and thoughtful at times, that her uncle told her the north had seized upon her heart at last, and she would leave it behind when she turned her face southward.

Mrs. Rae always grew restless and uneasy when the talk ran in this vein. Doctors might talk about hearts—she supposed it was absolutely necessary to do so occasionally ; but to mention such a thing to a young girl was in Mrs. Rae's opinion as unbecoming as to talk about her underclothing. She had not expected such impropriety from Stephen Gilpin, and it made her more than ever convinced that he was not altogether the man to be trusted with the care of a young girl.

But it so happened that that return to the south and to work was delayed from day to day on Mr. Rae's account. That mountain climb had taken a great deal out of him. He was by no means so well as when he had returned from Scotland, so another week or two's rest was advised ; and Rie, perverse creature that she was, secretly rejoiced at the delay.

But the last day must come, and when the old man said, "I positively must and will go home this week, so as to be ready for next Sunday—Susannah, we will say Friday," everybody acquiesced, and made no further opposition.

Alan had by this time been removed to his home, whither his sister and aunt had accompanied him, and the extortionate charges of lodging-house keepers now served to vary the monotonous round of Sir Andrew's

grievances. But Sir Andrew was certainly not himself, and though excitement had lent him something of his old asperity and persistence on the day after Alan's accident, it was evident to all those around him that he was not the man he once had been.

"Lady Wyke and that old sheep," said Patty irreverently, "must divide the honour and glory of quelling the tyrant's pride. I really don't know which has the most to do with it, but that the house has suffered less from squalls of late, there can be no doubt."

Patty was herself again, equal to any amount of nonsense, and she and Lady Wyke vied with each other which could do the most to make Alan's room gay and sweet with flowers, and all that was bright and enlivening.

But Alan, though doing well as regarded his broken bones, was grave and much addicted to fits of silence, which the doctor ascribed to the shock he had received, but which Patty and Miss Judith explained in another fashion.

"Do you know, Alan," his sister remarked one day, "those old people are leaving on Friday, and they mean to take Rie with them,—isn't it a bore?"

Alan started, and grew suddenly attentive.

"Friday," he said, "that's to-morrow; they won't go without coming to say good-bye, I'm sure."

"But isn't it tiresome of them to take Rie? She's the only girl I care for in these parts."

Alan was silent again, but when Patty repeated, "Isn't it too bad?" he replied, "I suppose she wanted to go."

Patty laughed.

"Alan," she said, "I heard something yesterday about Rie which would amuse you immensely, but I don't



think I'll tell you, you haven't treated me properly of late, and it is time I taught you your duty."

"Is it? Still it would be a pity to refuse yourself the pleasure of telling a good story, Patty, you do it so well."

"Own that you are dying to hear it."

"Of course; your voice is music to my ears, Patty."

"And if I don't tell you, you will spend the whole afternoon wondering what this story is—now won't you?"

"Possibly; I've nothing else to do. But you are going to tell me, so I shall not have that trouble."

"Didn't I say I would do no such thing?"

"No, Pat, you made no such rash vow. Come, out with it, you are dying to tell."

"Well, I always spoil you, so here's my tale. Aunt Judy went yesterday to call on that wonderful old person, Mrs. Rae, and this is the tale she heard. She—that is Mrs. Rae—and the two old parsons had been holding a solemn council—really it puts me in mind of that awful conclave described in Scott's *Marmion*, the old Prioress and Abbess and Abbot, don't you remember?"

'There met to doom in secrecy,  
Were placed the heads of convents three.'

You know the rest . . . the niche in the wall and the runaway nun."

"Well; go on."

"Now, Alan, what do you think these three—the old lady with the wonderful hat, and the two old owls of parsons—had met to consider?"

"Can't imagine; go on."

"They have taken it into their wonderful old heads

A A

that Rie, naughty girl! has formed a dangerous, because an utterly unrequited, attachment. They see it in her eyes, in her walk, in the way she puts her clothes on, and they are seriously uneasy about her."

"Are they going to place her in a convent, or bury her alive?"

"They are going to take her to London, out of the way of danger, I suppose. Mrs. Rae tried to lay the blame on the other two, but Aunt Judy was too much amused to hear the whole story to the end."

"What did she say,—Aunt Judy, I mean?"

"Now, Alan, wouldn't you like to know? Hadn't you better ask Aunt Judy?"

"No; you shall finish your story yourself. What did she say?"

"Don't you know Aunt Judy is always the champion of the oppressed? Of course she defended poor little Rie, and said she was not a girl to fall in love lightly, advised them to put such notions out of their silly old heads, in fact—now, Alan, why are you staring at me? —aren't you amused?"

But Alan did not seem inclined to answer this inquiry. At last he said with some embarrassment—

"Patty, does Rie ever talk to you about this matter?"

"Rie talk to me?—no, not a word; and no more does Alan; he might as well not have a sister."

"That's a mistake," replied Alan, laughing; "words aren't necessary between us, Patty; you know all there is to tell."

"Do I? Shall I tell you what I don't know?"

"If you like."

"What is to be done next?"

Apparently that was the point on which Alan was also perplexed.

"Would it not be as well to take those old people into your confidence?" suggested Patty.

But Alan shook his head.

"We have always managed our own affairs, Patty," he said.

"But you are tied by the leg," she replied. "Am I to go a-wooing for you?"

He shook his head. At that moment the door opened to admit old Nan, bringing some afternoon tea for the invalid, and the message—

"If you please, Miss Patty, you're wanted in the drawing-room,—there's visitors."

"Who is it, Nan?"

"Well, I believe it's Mr. and Mrs. Rae and Miss Rie. They were having tea, and Lady Wyke sent for you."

"Tell Rie she must come and say good-bye to Nan," said Alan. "Nan, stay with me while I drink my tea; you neglect me shamefully."

"But he didn't seem to have much to say," reflected the old nurse afterwards; "but no doubt he was thinking how to put it to the young lady, she was that particular with him."

Yet if Alan was searching for words in which to woo his love, the old story took the old shape when she stood by his side, and first Nan and then Patty had slipped away.

She looked startled when she first found herself, not in the housekeeper's room, but in the dainty little sitting-room which Lady Wyke had given up to her step-son; and what could Patty mean by running away and leaving her there? Patty was such a queer girl, she was always doing such odd things. Rie inwardly vowed she would be more on her guard in future. And old Nan

too, why did she go away just when she had taken the trouble to come up-stairs to see her?

She looked at Alan shyly, nervously, for surely he too must wonder what it all meant; but he was gazing at her earnestly, so earnestly that she said to herself there was only one thing to be done, she must say good-bye and go, or that secret of hers, that new-born secret, would discover itself—and that must never, never be.

"I must go," she said; "I wonder why Patty went off without me."

"Patty will be back in a few minutes, I dare say," Alan answered carelessly; "wait for her, Rie. Do you know I have been wanting to see you so much to thank you for all your goodness to Patty the day of my unlucky fall. She has told me all about it, and how you went scrambling about the hill with her to look for me. It is just like your unselfishness, Rie, and I shall never forget it."

"How could I have done anything else?—she was so miserable—we were all so anxious."

He looked at her and waited, hoping to hear more, perhaps trying to trace some other meaning in her cautious words, but she said no more.

"We agreed to be friends," he said, with a half-smile. "We *are* friends, are we not, Rie?"

"Yes, of course," she answered; "why not?"

"Never anything more, Rie? Never anything nearer—dearer? Do you remember telling me to change my mind, to leave off caring for you, to forget I had ever loved you? Do you remember, Rie?"

She bent her head, and with the end of her sunshade began to poke a pin out of the carpet at her feet. He went on—

"I *have* not done it, Rie; the love is there just the

same—yet no, not the same, for I love you more, more than ever. Tell me, does it vex you still?”

“Vex me?” she said, looking away from him, out of the window far away to the hills and the snowy clouds above them; “every one likes to be loved, I suppose.”

“Rie, you are not like everybody. Sometimes I think that love and devotion such as I can give are nothing to you, that you do not need them, do not care for them; is it so?”

“Perhaps I thought so *once*,” she answered, still keeping her eyes intently on the sky and distant hills.

“Once?” he said eagerly; “then can it be that *you* have changed your mind? Rie, have you any idea all that little word means to me?”

“But you are wrong,” she said impetuously, “quite wrong to think of me in that way. I am not in the least the kind of girl that you imagine, not at all the right kind of wife for you, Alan.”

“Rie, don’t stand out there, but come and sit here in Patty’s chair, where I can see you. No, don’t take that one, it is most uncomfortable. Now, what was it you said? you were going to tell me what sort of wife I needed, weren’t you?”

“No, indeed!”

“Weren’t you? But indeed you need not take the trouble, because that has been settled for some time. Little Rie is the wife I need.”

She shook her head.

“Why not, Rie? What did that word ‘once’ mean? Can’t you persuade yourself to love me?”

“It isn’t that,” she said nervously, knotting the fringe of a *couvre-pieds* as she spoke; “it isn’t that. I’m afraid I do love you, Alan, but it’s most unfortunate;” and then she heaved a deep sigh.

"Unfortunate! not at all. Come, Rie, if you love me—and you have said it, my darling, you have said it—it cannot, shall not be unfortunate. What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Rie, flushing all over her face, "that the mere thought of being the wife of a country gentleman, with nothing on earth to do but keep a house nice and amuse myself, is more than I can bear. I can't undertake it, Alan, I really can't."

He laughed, and lifted the little hand she had raised to emphasize her words, to his lips.

"Yes, I know," she said, "you think me very absurd, and I dare say you think that if I cared for you I could put up with it. But I can't; I should grow cross, and eat my very heart out with *ennui*. You do not know me, Alan; I wasn't made to be married, if marriage means the kind of life I see people lead here in the country—oh, and in London too. A little housekeeping, a little entertaining, a few calls, dinners, and balls. I might make a tolerable wife to a working-man, but not to you, Alan Wyke. Oh, I've thought about it, and I know I couldn't."

"But, my own sweet Rie, you are labouring under a strange delusion. Alan Wyke *is* a working-man, and will never be anything else, so help him God!"

But she did not seem to hear him, and though she did not draw the hand away which he held, she went on vehemently—

"I cannot do it, Alan, I really can't. Such a life would kill me!"

"Whose life are you thinking of?" he asked, amused at her energy; "Aunt Judith's?"

"No, oh no; *she* does an infinitude of good. I would give anything to be like her. But I was thinking of your wife's life, Alan. You will want her to dress

nicely, make the house pretty, have nice dinners, and behave nicely, go to dinner-parties and balls, and live—oh, just like the rich man in the parable, and I can't do it, not even to please you."

"Yes," he answered, smiling, "I *shall* want her to do all you say, and a multitude of things besides. My wife will have a busy life. But as for Dives, I fail to see how you will resemble him. Neither you nor I will be rich, Rie; no fear of that. When I think of all I want to do, I find myself a very poor man indeed."

"Really?" she said.

"Really and truly. No fear of purple and fine linen, and sumptuous fare."

She smiled at him, but there were tears in her bright eyes.

"There are so many Lazaruses lying at our gates," she said.

"Just so, sweet one; and you and I, as Patty says, have always had a taste for low society."

"There is Patty coming," she said, and thereupon she grew quiet and shy, and pushed her chair back, and tried to look just as usual. She was a little afraid of Patty, the girl had a trick of saying such strange things, and Rie did not feel very sure of herself just then. Alan would tell his sister, she knew, and who could guess what Patty would say?

She came in singing—she was always singing—but stopped at once to exclaim at the strange condition of Alan's cushions and pillows, and set herself to tidy up, as she expressed it. Then she turned upon Rie.

"Come, is it peace or war?" she asked. "But I need not ask; he has got his own way for once in his life, I see, and I am glad. But you must come away now, Rie, for your grandfather is coming up to see Alan, and

I want you to come and see baby, we are afraid he is growing a moustache ; and besides, I want to burn that hat of yours—my sister shall never wear a thing like that if I can get hold of it. I am glad you are going to marry Alan, because that will give me a right to meddle with your dress, which I have been longing to do for months past."

That evening the conclave sat again in the vicarage. Rie had gone to bed, wondering much at her own perverseness, for she could not help confessing to herself that her heart was at rest, though all the dreams and plans of past years had been suddenly swept away. The three old people were relieved at her departure, for they had much to say about her.

Mrs. Rae was glad to find that her confidence in the child had not been misplaced, though really when she considered what an excellent soul Mr. Spence was, in spite of his stammer, and what an active little body Mr. Lowe was, notwithstanding his tight clothes, she could not help being surprised that Rie had not preferred one of these to her old playfellow, Alan Wyke.

Her husband's keen grey eyes twinkled at this outspoken declaration of his wife's sentiments.

"My dear," he said, "for once in your life I must charge you with inconsistency. You were confident yesterday that Rizpah would never permit herself to fall in love with any man who had not sought her. Now have you any reason for thinking that Spence has attempted to put his admiration for the child into words? I say attempted, for it is more than likely it would never have come off. No, you say ; then I'm sure you will admit that it was not Rie's duty to prefer him to Alan, who has, he tells me, not only attempted, but



actually succeeded in declaring his passion, and that more than once. And as for Lowe, good fellow as he is, since he finds it difficult to find cloth enough to clothe himself, I must confess I hope he will not lightly undertake to find food and raiment for a wife."

"Decidedly the child has chosen the most eligible of the three," said Stephen Gilpin.

But at this point it became evident that Rie had not gone to bed as yet. Engaged young ladies take liberties, and know that they will not be reproved. The three old people started like detected conspirators as she came into the room, and made great pretence to be talking of nothing in particular; but Rie, as usual, made no pretence at all. She did not even make a feint of having forgotten something, but went straight to her uncle's side, and putting her arms round his neck, she hid a very rosy face on his shoulder as she said—

"Uncle Stephen, don't say so. Oh, I heard you; I was in the garden, and the window is open. Don't say that; I never chose him at all, he chose me. Was it very selfish of me to say yes? There are so many girls who would suit him far better than I shall."

"Are there? What a pity he didn't find it out!"

"Uncle, I am going to tell you a great secret, and if you tell Alan I will never forgive you—no, never. I'm so very glad he did not find it out, and I shall take care he never does." Then she fled away to bed, and the three old people sat looking at each other with wondering eyes for the space of five minutes; then they nodded gravely, and said—

"That child's in love!"